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Where have all the jobs gone?

BY JON BEKKEN

As the economic "recovery" enters its 28th month, U.S. employers are adding hundreds of new jobs a month. In February, Bureau of Labor Statistics figures reveal, some 32,000 U.S. workers were hired into temporary positions – out of 21,000 "new" jobs created that month. (The other 11,000 new temp workers presumably got jobs held by workers with some expectation of benefits and job security the month before.)

February's official unemployment rate held steady at 5.6 percent, primarily because 392,000 people quit the work force. Some of that reflects retirements, workers killed on the job, and other normal attrition; but in a country with a steadily growing population, the number of people entering the labor market is ordinarily substantially larger than those leaving it. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the share of the U.S. population either working or actively seeking work (which is how the work force is defined) is now at its lowest point – 65.9 percent – since 1988.

Many factors are combining to hold down labor market participation, from early retirement to more people being locked up in prison. But the largest factor is the number of people who have simply given up on finding jobs in the present economy, perhaps taking a lesson from the millions of jobless workers who have been looking for work for more than six months.

Long-term unemployment is now at its highest rate since 1983, and is hitting better-educated and more experienced workers particularly hard. "In this persistent jobless recovery," the Economic Policy Institute reports, "anemic job creation has caused increased long-term unemployment in all employment sectors. The data indicate that the long-term jobless face significant hardship not because they lack skills, experience or motivation, but for a reason beyond their control – the absence of available jobs."

Not surprisingly, wages are being hit hard by the recovery. Inflation-adjusted hourly wages fell for most workers last year, with the median wage increase of 2.0 percent lagging 2.3 percent inflation. (Half of all workers are above the median, half below.) The decline in workers' buying power was particularly severe for the lowest-paid, with the bottom tenth seeing inflation-adjusted weekly earnings drop by 0.7 percent last year after several years of steady, if modest, increases.

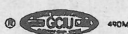
The picture is particularly bleak for U.S. manufacturing workers – who have lost 3.1 million jobs since March 1998. Many in the labor movement believe that this because manufacturers are moving jobs overseas. And many companies *have* shut down U.S. plants in order to shift production to lower-paid workers in other countries – at least 21,513 U.S. factories were closed in the last two years. (Though this is hardly a one-way street; in recent years Volkswagen has threatened striking Latin American workers that their jobs could go to more docile workers in the United States.)

But this is far from the only culprit. A recent study by Alliance Capital Management found that factory employment in 20 major economies declined by over 22 million jobs (11 percent) from 1995 through 2002. Factory employment rose in Canada and Spain at the same time that it was falling in the United States, China, England, Japan and Brazil – showing that higher wages can't explain the losses. (China lost

continued on page 11

James Connolly **2** Organizing Computer Workers **3** Radical Economics **4**
CN Rail Strike **5** Farewell, Fellow Workers **10** Haiti Workers Under Attack **12**

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Software workers demand back pay

IWW computer workers pursuing deadbeat boss

3

Workers always victims of terror

CNT statement on Madrid subway bombings

6

Grocery workers lose 5-month fight

Two-tier pay and health benefits betray workers' futures

8

Colombia: Hunger strike challenges Killer Coke

BY PETER MOORE

Coca-Cola workers began a hunger strike in front of eight Colombian bottling plants March 15, continuing a long struggle against the company's effort to break their union by closing the plants.

"If we lose the fight against Coca-Cola," noted Juan Carlos Galvis, vice president of the union local in Barrancabermeja, "we will first lose our union, next our jobs, and then our lives."

The SINALTRAINAL union, which represents most Coca-Cola workers in Colombia, issued a statement March 16 expressing concern over management threats and the presence of cars with tinted windows (often used by death squads) at the plants.

The statement also "denounce[d] the boss attitude of the Social Security Ministry, which authorized the closure of 10 Coca-Cola plants and the mass layoff of the workers when this business is one of the most viable in Colombia and the world... The employer is substituting workers and exploiting the workers of third-party contractors with total disregard for labor laws."

Coca-Cola FEMSA, Coke's largest Colombian bottler, closed production lines at 11 of its 16 bottling plants Sept. 9. Since then, management has pressured more than 500 workers into "voluntarily resigning" in exchange for a severance payment. But many workers refused to resign, instead demanding that the plants be reopened or workers transferred to other facilities as required by their union contract. On Feb. 25 the government's labor ministry authorized the company to dismiss 91 workers, most of whom are union leaders.

These dismissals are part of an ongoing campaign by Coca-Cola FEMSA to eliminate the union. Seven SINALTRAINAL leaders have been murdered, including Isidro

Segundo Gil, who was shot to death by paramilitaries inside the plant in Carepa, and 67 have been threatened with death. Today, 88 percent of Coke workers in Colombia are temporary employees or contractors, many of whom earn the minimum wage of \$120 per month and don't have any benefits.

Coca-Cola owns 46.4 percent of the company and has several directors on its board.

On March 9, management trapped workers in the bottling plants in Cucuta and Cartagena for several hours, pressuring them to renounce their work contracts.

The union is continuing negotiations with another Coke bottler, Panamco Colombia S.A., but in a climate of fear aimed at forcing workers to surrender their right to job security.

Several Coca-Cola workers also face criminal charges brought by the company in retaliation for a lawsuit filed by the union.

As a result, the international campaign against Killer Coke continues. After nearly four hours of intense debate including presentations by Coca Cola officials, the Carleton College Student Association voted to terminate its vending contract with Coca-Cola March 8, which will lead to the removal of 42 Coke machines from the campus.

SINALTRAINAL leader Luis Adolfo Cardona, exiled in the United States since 2002, had spoken at the college two weeks before, causing the student government to reassess its decision to renew its Coke contract.

Several unions, including the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, have also booted Coke machines from their halls and offices.

In addition to the violence against workers in Colombia, the Campaign to Stop Killer Coke's website, www.killercoke.org, highlights other abuses by Coca-Cola throughout the world.

Millions protest U.S. war, occupation of Iraq

More than two million workers joined protests in hundreds of cities across the world March 20, marking the one-year anniversary of the U.S.-led war on Iraq.

Longshore workers shut down all Bay Area ports for a stop work meeting to protest the occupation, and then led a march of more than 30,000 through the streets of San Francisco. Longshore workers in Oregon also refused to move cargo that day.

Demonstrations ranged from a few dozen in East Timor to a million or more in the streets of Rome. In Spain, hundreds of thousands of people joined antiwar marches, reinforcing pressure on the newly elected government to honor its pledge to withdraw Spanish troops. "Solidarity with the victims of Madrid, Iraq and Palestine," read one banner in Barcelona, where nearly 200,000 people marched.

Rallies took place in Australia, Japan, South Korea, India, Bangladesh and Thailand. Thousands marched in Melbourne and Sydney, chanting "End the occupation, troops out" and carrying an effigy of Prime Minister John Howard, a firm supporter of the war. The Kyodo news agency estimated that 120,000 protested across Japan. In the Philippines, riot police used water cannons to disperse demonstrators who tried to march on the U.S. embassy.

In Greece, around 10,000 protesters marched toward the U.S. embassy in Athens

which was protected by hundreds of riot police. Thousands took to the streets across Turkey to denounce the occupation and a planned visit by U.S. President Bush to the country for June's NATO summit.

A demonstration attracted about 2,500 people in Brussels. In Germany, thousands of people joined demonstrations in about 70 cities and towns across the country.

Reuters reported that more than a million protesters crammed the streets of Rome. "This is a gigantic demonstration," Nobel prize-winning playwright Dario Fo said as a sea of rainbow-colored peace flags bobbed above protesters marching to a rally at the Circus Maximus.

More than 100,000 protesters joined antiwar demonstrators in cities across the United States, while tens of thousands marched in London. In Poland, which has deployed 2,500 troops in Iraq, hundreds of peace activists marked the anniversary with a march to the U.S. embassy.

About 2,000 protestors in Egypt carried banners mocking the inability of the U.S.-led forces to find weapons of mass destruction. "No WMD, but 20,000 Iraqi civilians killed ... this is Bush's democracy," read a banner in English.

The day before, hundreds of people blockaded the Bechtel headquarters in San Francisco March 19, after two marches led by teachers and health care workers.

Confusing the issue: James Connolly and the IWW

Alan Johnstone's piece in the last IW, which also ran in the Edinburgh newsletter Burning Issue, prompted this reply (which has been edited for length):

Aljo introduces his article by saying that though Connolly is best known for his "tragic martyrdom in the cause of Irish nationalism," what is often overlooked "is Connolly's active membership of the Industrial Workers of the World and his stalwart advocacy of Industrial Unionism." But there may be sound reasons for overlooking Connolly's "stalwart advocacy."

Aljo opens his article with a Connolly quote: "All actions of our class at the ballot box are in the nature of mere preliminary skirmishes; ... the conquest of political power by the working class waits upon the conquest of economic power and must function through the economic organisation."

Stuff to stir the Wobbly heart. Originally outlined in a letter to an Edinburgh friend, the same words appear in Connolly's collection of lectures and essays *Socialism Made Easy*, published in 1909. A few lines later, in *Socialism Made Easy*, Connolly adds:

"You need the open union and the closed shop if you ever intend to control the means and conditions of life. And, as the champion of your class upon the political field, as the ever active propagandist of the idea of the Working Class, as the representative and embodiment of the social principle of the future, you need the Socialist Party."

James Connolly was a life-long political socialist. At age 21 he joined the Socialist League in Edinburgh and three years later became the secretary of the Scottish Socialist Federation. In 1896 he went to Dublin and founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party. While working in the States in 1905 he joined the newly-formed IWW and at the same time the Socialist Labor Party, which was headed by the autocratic Daniel De Leon. The two men soon clashed in a furious debate and Connolly resigned the SLP in 1907 to join

the breakaway Socialist Party of America. In 1910 he returned to Dublin at the invitation of the new Socialist Party of Ireland, and soon became its national organiser. ...



This, the "political clause," caused no end of trouble as members of the SLP and SPA battled it out for control of the IWW. By 1908 a movement was growing within the union to end these destructive political shenanigans. In a March edition of the IWW's *Industrial Union Bulletin*, organiser Ben Williams sent a message to those members who "belong to one or the other of the two socialist parties." His message was succinct: "Hands Off."

Connolly's position was what might be called a "third way." Aljo quotes Connolly from the first issue of *The Harp* (January 1908), where he writes that militants "must realise that their place is in the only economic organisation truly worthy of the name of union, the IWW." But the quote is taken from "A Political Party of the Workers," where Connolly quickly adds, "so we believe that the same body has it in its power to solve the problems of Socialist unity. On the day that the IWW launches its own political party it will put an end to all excuse for two Socialist parties... it will be the real Political Party of the Workers – the weapon by which the working class will register the decrees which its economic army must and shall enforce."

Extending the quote throws new light on Connolly's "stalwart advocacy of Industrial Unionism." Connolly's "third way" was that the IWW should launch its own political party, an archaic notion that jars in the mind of most modern IWW members. In 1908 Connolly wrote to his old comrade in Edinburgh, J. Carstairs Matheson: "I would rather have the IWW undertake both political and economic activity now, but as the great majority of the workers in the movement are against me in that matter, I do not propose to make my desires a stumbling block."

The great majority of workers in the move-

ment are still against him in this matter.

As noted, Connolly and De Leon had a furious fallout over Marxian economics, a row that led to Connolly's resignation from the Socialist Labour Party. "Never a man to forgive and forget," writes W.K. Anderson, "Connolly was instrumental the following year in ensuring that the IWW convention rejected not only De Leon's economic theories but also his right to remain a member of the organisation (in fact, the 1908 Convention took no action against his membership – ed.). ... De Leon's debacle was gratifying to [Connolly] on both political and personal grounds. Yet the IWW's hard anti-political line, pointing as it did to a move towards anarcho-syndicalism, was one which he tried to avert and continued to oppose within the IWW after the convention."

At the IWW's 1908 Convention, delegates removed the "political clause" and added to the Constitution the clause "the IWW refuses all alliances, direct or indirect, with existing political parties or anti-political sects."

Connolly was opposed to the new anti-political stance and, until his murder by the British military, propagated the idea of industrial unions acting in tandem with a political party. After the "political clause" was deleted from the IWW Preamble, James Connolly was very much a square peg in a round hole. His take on industrial unionism was summed up in another issue of *The Harp*: "One Socialist Party embracing all shades of and conceptions of political thought. One Socialist Industrial Organisation drilling the working class for the supreme mission of their class – the establishment of a Workers Republic."

In *Socialism Made Easy* Connolly writes: "Nothing can prevent the union of the economic and political forces of Labour. I look forward to the time when every economic organisation will have its Political Committee, just as it has... its Strike Committee, and when it will be considered to be as great ... an act of scabbery to act against the former as the latter."

A Political Committee in every union – and every union branch? And any disagreement with the Politcom to be "considered ... an act of scabbery"? These, I suggest, are dangerous words.

Aljo claims Connolly "travelled to Ireland and promoted the ideas and methods of the IWW." He may have promoted IWW tactics, but never, as far I can ascertain, did Jim Connolly ever try to organise the IWW in Ireland, though he certainly had the clout to do so. By this time the IWW (with its political clause deleted and its 'no political alliances' constitution) was of little interest to Jim Connolly and his vision of the one political party and its one industrial organisation.

Near the end of his article Aljo includes a quote from *Socialism Made Easy* about how "the principle of democratic control will operate through the workers correctly organised in such industrial unions, and that the political, territorial state of capitalist society will have no place or function." We may agree with Jim Connolly on the final outcome – it's how to get there that causes the disagreements. I will close with another quote from the same work (emphasis in the original):

"If we accept the definition of working class political action as that which brings the workers as a class into direct conflict with the possessing class as a class, and keeps them there, then we must realise that nothing can do that so readily as action at the ballot box. Such action strips the working class movement of all traces of such sectionalism as may, and indeed must, cling to strikes and lock-outs, and emphasises the class character of the Labour Movement. It is therefore absolutely indispensable for the efficient training of the working class along correct lines that action at the ballot box should accompany action in the workshop."

James Connolly's IWW died in 1908. Let it rest in peace.

Aljo's medley of half-quotes lifted entirely out of context gives a false and misleading picture of James Connolly and his part in the IWW. It misleads those very workers we would recruit into our ranks.

I will say no more – except that those damned union Political Committees and the punishment for any worker who would cross them keep coming to mind. But then I hear the words of Ben Williams' 1908 warning to the warring politicians: Hands Off.

Eddie Murray, Edinburgh

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- ★ EDUCATION
- ★ EMANCIPATION

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Around Our Union

Scottish Wobblies have a new newsletter, *Burning Issue*. The debut issue includes biting articles about trade union (in)activity, outsourcing of UK jobs, Scotland-born IWW organizer James Connolly, and local efforts.

In Lake County, Illinois, a new General Organizing Committee is focusing on the restaurant industry. Downstate Wobs hope to charter a General Membership Branch soon.

In March General Secretary-Treasurer Alexis Buss spoke on labor and the environment with members of the Student Environmental Action Coalition, as part of a student gathering called the COOL idealist.org National Conference.

Industrial Worker editor Jon Bekken spoke on a panel on the history of radical media at the New York City Grassroots Media Conference in February. He and FW Morgan Miller will appear on a panel at the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association Conference in Eugene, Oregon, in May.

Organizer training in Upstate New York May 15 & 16

The Upstate NY Regional General Membership Branch will host a two-day organizer training May 15 and 16 at the Women's Building in downtown Albany, New York.

In addition to the training, visiting Wobblies and the general public will be invited to a Saturday night performance of the local Branch's "Picket Line Poets." Housing is available for out-of-town Wobblies. For information, phone Branch Secretary Greg Giorgio at 518-861-5627 or email therev@capital.net.

Readers' Soapbox: IU 560

With the signing of their first contract by the Eugene www.efn.org IU 560 Wobblies, the successes of the Revolt Collective in Portland (an IU 560 shop), the organization of Free Speech TV in Boulder, Colorado, and the presence of our own 560 branch here in the Bay Area, we really should start thinking about building an international Communications Workers Industrial Union 560.

The formation of an actual functioning IU 560 union would not only help each IU 560 shop/branch/member with IU 560 issues, including the provision of mutual aid and more effective solidarity, but would also provide more visibility and legitimacy to the IWW as a whole and lead to additional organizing opportunities, especially in IU 560.

In addition to contacting Wobblies involved in past 560 efforts and building stronger ties between the IU 560 shops, we should start a program of solidarity with workers in mainstream communications unions.

For a while it seemed like no progress was being made to build IU 560, but quietly, over the past 18 months, several localized IU 560 successes have occurred, thanks to the hard work and diligence of our fellow workers. The time is now to strike while the iron is hot. Let's start building a functioning international Communication Workers IU 560.

Steve Ongerth, San Francisco

George Orwell & C.C. Redcloud

C.C. Redcloud has hit the nail on the head in comparing Bush's war to an Orwellian situation. As in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Bush says one thing at one time – weapons of mass destruction in Iraq – and then, when weapons of mass destruction were not found, he gives another reason, and acts as if this new reason is the one he has always given.

In *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal" becomes "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

"No animal shall kill another animal" becomes "No animal shall kill another animal without cause."

"No animal shall sleep in a bed" becomes "No animal shall sleep in a bed with a shirt."

So, we are going into Iraq because of weapons of mass destruction becomes we went into Iraq to get Saddam because Saddam is a terrorist and now he will no longer threaten America.

Raymond Solomon, New York

Computer workers: Does your boss pay you?

IWW members working for the RedcellX embedded software firm continue to fight for back pay. The company, founded in Oregon by Troy Melquist four years ago, shut down in late February after the Internal Revenue Service imposed penalties on the firm after investigating worker complaints. On March 1, former RedcellX workers issued a leaflet, "Does your boss pay you? Ours didn't!," warning of the scourge of deadbeat bosses.

In the summer of 2003, an IWW member complained that paychecks from RedcellX were bouncing. The Portland IWW negotiated a payment plan with Melquist in November for the \$4,300 owed him and another worker. Melquist then moved operations to a secret location, providing workers with three separate decoy addresses.

A subsequent investigation by the IWW uncovered 15 workers who claim they are owed over \$100,000. Melquist has a criminal record, mostly involving passing bad checks, spanning back to 1988. He has been sued repeatedly for nonpayment of bills.

Some workers were brought in under the pretense of being partners. As is true in many startups, several people worked for free for months or years, trying to get the business off the ground. But Melquist refused to show these "principals" accurate financial information and repeatedly touted nonexistent clients. He went as far as creating fictitious people to blame when something went wrong. For instance, he created a fake accountant, had an email account set up for her, and sent email from that account to workers when they had questions.

The IWW leaflet notes that Melquist "is not the only con man masquerading as an entrepreneur in this industry. With high unemployment after the Internet implosion of 2000 and a 'business culture' founded on working long, hard hours for nothing, unscrupulous people are having a field day exploiting honest workers."

The wreckage of RedcellX may seem to



be a worst case scenario, but it is representative of a larger problem endemic to our society. Workers in the computer industry suffer from a business culture in which workers are expected to put in long hours for little more than the prospect of striking it rich some day. The dot-com implosion of 2000 endowed some workers with a working class consciousness and left many more in desperate straits. This combination of ridiculous expectations and depressing economic reality enables people like Troy Melquist to erase the line between marketing bamboozlement and criminal con-artistry.

Software workers have discovered that titles and hard-earned skills do not save them from being disregarded as interchangeable parts in some giant machine. Corporations like RedcellX look only at the short term bottom line, and professional or not workers are being driven downward toward a third world standard of living.

This system is clearly unsustainable. The disparity between those who control the wealth and those who work for it increases daily. As a union we have always known that our only hope lies in worker organization. It is only made all the more obvious when the disparities increase.

Because of the efforts of the RedcellX

workers, we now have a substantial history of showing how Troy Melquist has cheated workers out of their livelihood. It will be much more difficult for him to take advantage of unsuspecting workers. But RedcellX's customers, landlord and vendors have been left in the lurch. And most importantly, many workers have spent thousands of hours of their lives on what amounts to a pointless exercise. Those hours can never be returned, so we continue efforts to collect the money Melquist owes for that time.

Some of the workers' claims will likely be partly paid through the State of Oregon's Wage Security Fund. While helpful to workers, we must remember this is public money, paid for by taxes on businesses, and the costs are passed on to regular working Oregonians. Why should average citizens underwrite Troy Melquist's illegal business practices?

Imagine how different the RedcellX experience would have been if the workers had had more say in running the company. What if the finances of the company had been made transparent? In the worst case scenario, the workers would have quit much earlier or been laid off without having wasted their time. In the best case, the workers' collective imagination and power could have overcome the predicament that Melquist was creating.

Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$1,000, dues are \$6 a month. If your monthly income is between \$1,000 - \$2,000, dues are \$12 a month. If your monthly income is over \$2,000 a month, dues are \$18 a month.

- ☐ I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer
- ☐ I agree to abide by the IWW constitution
- ☐ I will study its principles and make myself acquainted with its purposes.



Name: _____
Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Occupation: _____
Phone: _____ E-mail: _____
Amount Enclosed: _____
Membership includes a subscription to the *Industrial Worker*.



I've received my first complaint letter, which, in fairness, has much validity. It comes from a rank-and-file IAM machinist in St. Louis. Here is a relevant bit: "While often your column contains very funny items, especially in regards to bosses, your portrayals of the AFL's leadership to be a bunch of idiots is way off target. For the most part, the AFL's leadership is much worse."

★ ★ ★

The SoCal grocery strike is over. In an internal memo slipped to this reporter, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) claims a rousing victory. The memo continues on to also claim peace in our time, the lions are sleeping with the lambs, and the existence of lemonade springs. When questioned by F.N. Brill over the claims, UFCW spokesperson, Albie Apiekard responded with a rousing: "Four legs good, two legs bad."

★ ★ ★

The popularity of the movie "The Passion of the Christ" has spilled all over pop culture. Religion is everywhere. But it's getting way out of hand. My kids brought home a computer game the other day based on, of all things, Dante's Inferno. It's called "Where in Hell is Carmen San Diego."

★ ★ ★

Ralph Nader has announced he would run for president. An upset Democratic presidential hopeful, Dennis Kucinich, was quoted by a Cleveland newspaper as saying, "He's going to steal my voter away!"

★ ★ ★

You know why there's no Industrial Union 288 in the IWW? Because Big Bill thought it was too gross.

★ ★ ★

While this may not seem to be big news for our non-U.S. readers, it is expected here that gasoline (aka petrol) prices will go up to \$3 per gallon this year, rising from an average of \$1.70. Oil companies have denied the claim saying, that on the contrary, they expect gas prices to be down to at least \$3 a gallon by the end of the year.

★ ★ ★

Last month U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft was in a Washington, D.C., hospital to have his gallbladder removed. Doctors also unsuccessfully tried to remove the stick from his butt.

★ ★ ★

I read about some recent archeological discoveries in Europe this week. First, new cave paintings were found in France. The French Culture minister was quoted in one paper as saying "France laid the foundations for art in the world." In Germany, the ruins of a 1,000-year-old brewery were discovered. German newspapers claimed this proves Germany laid the foundations for modern brewing practices. In the UK, a 1,000-year-old trash heap is being investigated. Tony Blair is quoted as saying, "This proves that the UK laid the foundations for modern global capitalism."

★ ★ ★

John Kerry makes a big deal about having a Purple Heart from Vietnam. To counter this, the Republicans have pointed out Dick Cheney has a purple heart from McDonalds.

★ ★ ★

Reading the boss press, you would think the real social question is: "Are the rich people you work for better off now than they were before?"

★ ★ ★

Frank Brill is proud to announce his first speaking tour will begin later this month. Starting by talking to himself at the bus stop near his home, he will travel via the number 15 bus to several other bus stops, where he will speak to all those who will listen. To speak to him send a letter to F.N. Brill, c/o IWW, 616 E. Burnside, Portland OR 97214, USA or e-mail fnbrill@yahoo.com

Million Worker March proposed

BY TRENT WILLIS, ILWU LOCAL 10

International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 recently passed a resolution proposing a million worker march on Washington in 2004. No date has been set yet, though we envision it taking place before November. This mobilization is being proposed in response to the attacks upon working families in America and the millions of jobs lost during the current Bush administration. The working class has not suffered such hardship since the era of the Great Depression.

The Bush Administration's focus of placing the acquisition of capital and the quest

for profits above the needs of the people is undermining the economic security of working people and the nation as a whole.

Now is the time for organized/unorganized labor, the interfaith and community organizations to show solidarity to demand that all elected officials address the needs of working people. While we are in the early stages of planning, we are urging organizations to join us in making this march a reality.

Contact: Million Worker March Committee, ILWU Local 10, 400 North Point, San Francisco CA 94133. Email: million-workermarch@comcast.net

In addition to workshops and the screening of new labor videos, there will be a special focus on the growing repression and censorship of labor media activists from Miami to the UK, Korea and Japan. Details are available at www.labortech2004.org.

Global justice actions

The annual April 21-25 meeting of the World Bank in Washington, D.C., will once again be met with massive street protests and teach-ins, culminating in a major protest Saturday, April 24. Details are available at www.globalizethis.org

March for women's lives

A march for women's reproductive rights will be held in Washington, D.C., April 25, to protest an ever-growing list of executive orders, judicial appointments and other legal attacks on abortion and birth control rights. For info: www.MarchforWomen.org.

LaborTech 2004

The annual LaborTech conference will be held April 2-4 at Stanford University in Palo Alto, CA. The conference brings together labor video, computer and media activists from throughout the U.S. and around the world.

A tale of two Canadian social priorities

BY X355424, VANCOUVER

In the early 1990s, Canada's federal government was spending over \$640 million each year on low income housing. It helped Canadians to feel ever so superior to Americans. While the U.S. spent hundreds of billions of dollars on so-called defense spending, and not a cent on low income housing, Canada actually seemed to have its social priorities substantially in order.

"Seemed" was, even then, the operative term. But we really did spend some money on providing social housing that was aimed at the poor, even if Canada was still spending more on its own military. Well, times have changed. And what priority has, almost dollar for dollar, replaced low-income housing?

The answer isn't to be found in Canada's military spending, which has always been higher. Nor is the answer within Canada's alarming expenditure on the U.S. Pentagon. I'm afraid that we Canadians are spending the money once spent on low-income housing on making sure that weapons grade plutonium is available to all.

Well, not quite all. Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. has sold and built 16 CANDU

reactors to Korea all right. And these reactors are all heavy water facilities, meaning that it's not that difficult to obtain plutonium. Fortunately, nobody seems to care that AECL sold the reactors to South Korea. That's right—Canada has ensured that South Korea has (or could easily have) the bomb.

The story gets worse. After having built a CANDU reactor for India, the Indians developed first an atomic bomb, and later a hydrogen weapon.

You would think that the long-standing hostility between India and Pakistan might cause AECL to reconsider selling a CANDU reactor, but not a bit of it. Pakistan later exploded an atomic bomb of its own. It's reasonably expected that the hydrogen bomb will be developed within the next decade.

Jean Chretien will be remembered by many Canadians as the prime minister who killed the nation's social conscience. This attitude is far too kind. Chretien's major achievement was twofold: he managed to temporarily confuse life-affirming priorities with those of the necrophile. Secondly, he confirmed the necessity of direct democracy and the folly of representative democracy.

Working women deserve a living wage

BY EDMONTON GENERAL MEMBERSHIP BRANCH

The Edmonton GMB issued the following statement to mark International Women's Day March 8:

Working women in Alberta have little to celebrate one hundred years after the founding of International Women's Day. This province has the lowest minimum wage and the lowest rate of unionization in Canada. The vast majority of working women in Alberta work in the service sector, in low-paid jobs with no benefits. The vast majority of these jobs pay fifty cents above the minimum wage of \$6 per hour. Worse yet, low-paid workers in Alberta are taxed by the government, which forces them to pay health care premiums.

In the past decade the government has removed 71,000 Albertans from social assistance, forcing these workers into low-paying jobs. The majority of those affected by the government's so-called "Work for Welfare" program have been women. Worse yet, this same government has clawed back federal funding for those on AISH and federal child tax credit funding for low-income Albertans.

Daycare workers in Alberta, who must spend two years in training, end up working for minimum wage with no benefits in an industry where unions are few and far between. In Fort McMurray the oil boom has not trick-

led down to these workers, who must pay sky high rents and food costs while trying to make ends meet.

The majority of women workers in Alberta, have no on-site child care provided by the employer, leaving them with the burden of paying for daycare. But publicly funded daycares are few and far between, as the government promotes privatized childcare by funding non-trained home-based babysitting services with federal funding earmarked for creating daycare services.

It is time that working Alberta families got a break from this government, like its business pals have. It is time for a Living Wage for all working Albertans: a minimum of \$10 per hour, reviewed annually for cost of living adjustments. Full benefits program; extend disability, dental, eye and hearing, extended hospitalization coverage, paid for jointly by the government and business. This Living Wage and benefits program to apply to both part-time and full-time workers in Alberta. Elimination of health care premiums, which is an unfair tax on all working Albertans. An end to government-funded 'babysitting' services, and the creation of daycare facilities in the community and work place jointly funded by the government and business.

Then Alberta working women and their families would have something to celebrate.

Conference: Radical economics and the labor movement

2005 will be the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World. To commemorate the centennial, the IWW is hosting a conference on radical economics in September 2005. The conference theme is the role of radical economics in the labor movement in the United States and around the world. Radical economics includes but is not restricted to anarchism, Marxism, syndicalism, radical Institutionalism, left-wing Keynesianism, and plain old-fashion radical economics.

Proposals on any aspect of the theme are invited. Possible topics include:

1. the role of radical economics in the education of workers such as radical economics in labor newspapers, the teaching of radical economics in labor schools, party schools, and colleagues and universities, in labor education programs, and in labor history courses.

2. the role of radical economics in union publications, such as the role of radical economics in IWW publications on the general

strike or the machine and unemployment.

3. the role of radical economics in union strike, bargaining, and organizing activities.

4. radical economics and the new society or the economics in utopian literature.

5. radical economics, syndicalism, Guild Socialism, and the IWW.

6. past and present development of radical economic theory.

7. recent developments in radical economics and their relevance to the radical labor movement and to rank-and-filers.

8. radical economics and the radical labor and radical student movements in the 20th century.

A selection of conference papers will be published in an edited volume in the Michigan University Press book series "Advances in Heterodox Economics."

The conference will be held Sept. 15 - 17, 2005 at the Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering and Technology, adjacent to the

continued next column

Canadian National rail workers strike

Some 5,000 Canadian National Railway workers struck Feb. 20; most CN employees are covered under different contracts and remained on the job. The strike came after CN withdrew proposals from the table and demanded that CAW members either submit to binding arbitration or revote on its "final" offer, which workers voted down in January.

CN claims operations are at "near-normal levels," though several clients complain that shipments have been delayed, especially for containers. The company concedes that container shipments are down 31 percent from a year ago, but says overall volume is down only 5 percent.

Workers in Southern Ontario auto plants are refusing to handle parts being shipped on CN trains. Production in several Ford plants was shut down until management agreed to make alternate arrangements to bring in parts. General Motors was forced to stockpile com-

pleted vehicles at its Oshawa plants because workers refused to load them onto scab-operated trains. Ford and Chrysler workers have also refused to allow finished engines and truck frames to be shipped out on scab trains.

The 5,000 striking CAW employees include office staff, intermodal yard workers, customer service representatives, and shopcraft workers who maintain locomotives and rail cars and perform safety inspections.

The union has complained of harassment and unwarranted discipline of its members, including several suspensions and firings of workers with 15 or more years experience. This has created an atmosphere in which many workers are afraid to insist on their rights to safe working conditions.

CN has sought injunctions to limit picketing, hired private security forces to harass pickets, and called on riot police in Montreal to attack picketers.

Wide, wide world of sweatshops

BY KENNETH MILLER

As spring training began, the Nation Labor Committee welcomed the 2004 baseball season by issuing two reports on Major League Sweatshops. Rawlings has been sewing baseballs in Costa Rica for the last 10 years (since they pulled out of Haiti), where they pay workers just 25¢ per ball. The popular Bobble Head figurines of players and mascots given away at game day promotions and sold at Wal Mart are made in China by workers who make as little as 17¢ an hour. During the factory's busy season, 18-hour shifts seven days a week are mandatory in some cases.

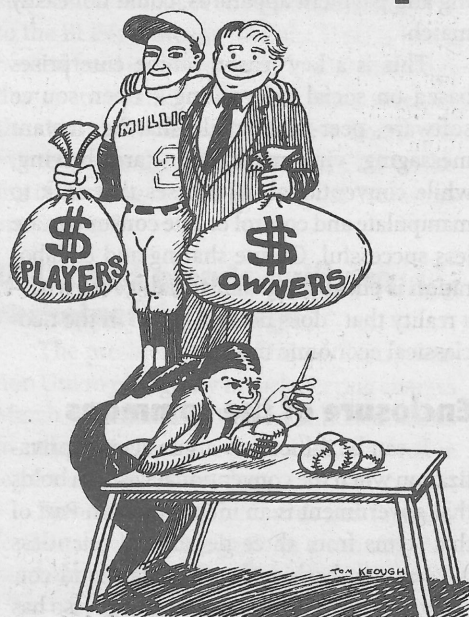
Each report emphasizes the pervasive fear in the factories, and the verbal and physical abuse of workers. Workers know that they will be terminated for speaking out or organizing a labor union to improve conditions. The workers who testified for these reports need protection. There are no codes of conduct, and international and local labor laws are being flagrantly violated. Factory monitoring by Wal Mart officials and other company-paid monitors has been demonstrated to simply be a white wash of abuses.

The reports also explain the power that Major League Baseball, the team owners and baseball players have to stop these abuses. Major League Baseball demonstrates its tremendous power over products with MLB logos through its strict enforcement of copy-right laws. The reports are at www.nlcnet.org.

No Sweatshops Bucco

Sweatshop solidarity activists in Pittsburgh continue to talk to baseball fans about sweatshops and demand immediate action by the Pittsburgh Pirates to protect the workers who sew the team's logo.

Several PNC Park solidarity actions are



Baseball: a multi-billion dollar industry. The game can't be played without the hand-stitched ball. Why are the balls made only in third world sweatshops?

planned, beginning Saturday, April 24, for Chuck Tanner Figurine Night. Friday May 28 is Baseball Card Set Night. June 19 is Team Photo Fest. July 3 is Stars and Stripes Cap Night. August 23 is Dollar Dog Night. Sept. 19 is Kids Snoopy Bobble Head Day.

Sweatshop Solidarity Activists will meet 90 minutes before the start of each game near the Roberto Clemente statue, rain or shine. Help plan campaign activities by writing to SweatFree Baseball, POB 99416, Pittsburgh PA 15233 or join the campaign email list by emailing SweatFree_Baseball_Campaign_subscribe@yahoo.com.

The message to the workers who sew baseballs and produce bobble heads: the fight for labor rights and freedom from fear in Major League Sweatshops is joined by Pittsburgh Pirate fans. The message for the Pittsburgh Pirates: No Sweatshops Bucco!

Jobless march in California's Silicon Valley

More than 100 demonstrators marched through downtown San Jose Feb. 18, protesting budget cuts and economic policy in the heart of Silicon Valley. The Valley was once seen as the center of the "new economy," a place where anyone could become a millionaire and opportunities were unlimited. As the unemployed workers marched, demanding living wage jobs, health care, housing and education, they also demonstrated just how much the Valley has changed.

"What recovery?" they chanted, arguing that the so-called economic recovery has brought little benefit for the majority of local residents. "Forget the stock market, show us the jobs!"

The march came the same day that Bush abandoned his recent prediction that the U.S. economy would add 2.6 million jobs in 2004, refusing to support his own economic report.



PHOTO: JEANNETTE GYSBERS

February 29th and March 6: IWW Edmonton Branch Members showed solidarity by supporting striking Canadian Auto Workers at the CN intermodal yards, stopping trucks in an information picket for 60 seconds at a time as they came and left the yards. CN goons with video cameras were on hand to make sure the trucks kept moving. Some workers shared stories of the goons threatening to rough them up at late-night pickets when no one else was around, or even in public venues away from the picket line; the CN police have also been troublesome... further proof of what we already know: the working class and the employing class have **nothing** in common. On the "bright" side, a number of the strikers have expressed interest in joining the IWW.

In health, Canada tops U.S.

The Los Angeles Times reports that our fellow workers to the north live longer, healthier lives than do U.S. workers, while paying half as much per capita (\$2,163 versus \$4,887 in 2001) on health care.

Why Canadians fare better is hotly debated. Some say it's Canada's single-payer, universal health coverage. Others say it's because Canadians use fewer illegal drugs and shoot each other less often with guns. And some believe it's something more fundamental: a smaller gap between rich and poor.

According to a World Health Organization report published in 2003, life expectancy

at birth in Canada is 79.8 years, versus 77.3 in the U.S.

"There isn't a single measure in which the U.S. excels in the health arena," University of Washington public health lecturer Dr. Stephen Bezruchka told the Times. "We spend half of the world's healthcare bill and we are less healthy than all the other rich countries."

"Fifty-five years ago, we were one of the healthiest countries in the world," Bezruchka continues. "What changed? We have increased the gap between rich and poor. Nothing determines the health of a population [more] than the gap between rich and poor."

Pictsweet mushroom workers win contract

BY GINNY BROWNE,
SANTA BARBARA INDYMEDIA

After years of nation-wide boycotts and protests, farm workers at Pictsweet Mushroom Farm in Ventura, Calif., have won their 17-year battle for a United Farm Workers union contract. The contract is the first reached under a state law passed in 2002 allowing agricultural workers and companies to file for binding mediation when they fail to reach an agreement.

On Feb. 13, the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board adopted a report from a state mediator deciding the terms of a union contract, seven months after Pictsweet workers filed for mediation. The contract went into effect after a two-week period giving both parties time to challenge the mediator's proposal. Pictsweet issued a scathing statement condemning the binding mediation law and process, but did not challenge the proposal. Pictsweet is one of six plaintiffs in a pending lawsuit aimed at overturning the legislation.

"How fitting that Pictsweet mushroom workers are the first California farm workers to benefit from the historic binding mediation law that allowed them to end their 17-year nonviolent fight for a union contract," said UFW President Arturo Rodriguez as he officially called off the union's three-year long boycott of Pictsweet mushrooms.

The contract, which is retroactive to Jan. 1, includes a 2.5 percent annual wage increase for workers and complete family medical coverage for Pictsweet's 300 workers.

South Korean hunger strike

Seven migrant workers have been on hunger strike in immigration detention centers in Hwasung and Yesoo and at Myeongdong Cathedral since March 9, protesting a new law binding immigrant workers to the employer who brings them into the country.

Dead and decorated

Canada's Governor General recently posthumously honoured two Ontario farm workers with Medals of Bravery, but the Ontario government continues to ignore four coroner's inquests that recommended ending the exclusion of Ontario farm workers from coverage under the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Gary George Ferrier and Erich Schulz were awarded Medals of Bravery posthumously. The two were overcome by toxic fumes in August 2000 while trying to rescue a co-worker who had fallen to the bottom of a liquid manure spreader tank on an Ontario farm. That worker also subsequently died. Because the tank was on a farm, OHSA regulations did not apply.

San Francisco unions support Camilo Viveiros defense

The San Francisco Labor Council voted Feb. 23 to urge Philadelphia authorities to drop charges against housing activist Camilo Viveiros, arrested nearly four years ago at a protest during the Republican Convention. If convicted on charges of assaulting then-Police Chief John Timoney with a bicycle, he could face up to 40 years in prison.

Hundreds of labor and community organizations have condemned the charges, and a majority of the Boston City Council, where Viveiros organized for several years, have signed letters supporting him.

The resolution notes Viveiros' deep family roots in the labor movement and his efforts to build coalitions between affordable housing organizations and unions, notes widespread reports of police misconduct during the protests, and points out that the charges "run counter to the reputation of a man well-known for strategic organizing, level headedness and community safety."

Information on the case, scheduled to go to trial April 5, can be found at <http://friendsofcamilo.org/>

Economics conference...

continued from preceding page

University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Abstracts of proposed papers (around 250 words) on any of the above suggested topics or on any topic dealing with radical economics and the labor movement in the 20th Century may be sent either electronically or by post to both:

Fred Lee, Department of Economics, 211 Haag Hall, University of Missouri-Kansas City 5100 Rockhill Road, Kansas City MO 64110 United States, email: leefs@umkc.edu

Jon Bekken, Communication Program, Albright College, P.O. Box 15234, Reading PA 19612-5234, email: jbekken@alb.edu

The deadline for submissions is Dec. 10, 2004 (the 98th anniversary of the first sit-down strike in the U.S. called by the IWW at General Electric in Schenectady, New York).

The conference aims to be inclusive, welcoming both professional economists and union activists. The registration fee of \$140 (including lunches, refreshments, and conference dinner) will be sharply discounted for IWW members and graduate students.

Who owns the sky?

BY DAVID BOLLIER, CLNEWS.ORG

Former Interior Secretary Walter Hickel once explained: "If you steal \$10 from a man's wallet, you're likely to get into a fight. But if you steal billions from the commons, co-owned by him and his descendants, he may not even notice."

Not since the Gilded Age of the 1890s has so much public wealth been shoveled into private hands with such brazen efficiency. Timber companies, corporate ranchers and foreign mining companies with cheap access to public lands are plundering our national patrimony. Congress obligingly turns a blind eye to the accompanying pollution, soil depletion and habitat destruction.

Companies are rushing to patent our genes, privatize agricultural seeds and stake private claims on plots of the ocean. Broadcasters – who enjoy free use of the public's airwaves, a subsidy worth hundreds of billions of dollars – are attempting to exploit an equivalent amount of electromagnetic spectrum for digital TV. We pay billions of dollars to sponsor risky path-breaking federal drug research, research that too often is given away to pharmaceutical companies for a song. Then we pay a second time – as consumers, at exorbitant prices – for the same drugs.

The privatization of public resources is not a new story, to be sure, but the current rapacity is truly stunning. Much of the immediate blame must go to the Bush administration, which has rewarded corporate contributors with one of the most sweeping waves of privatization and deregulation in our history. But while Republicans are the most aggressive cheerleaders for privatization, many Democrats equally enthuse about the "free market" as an engine of progress.

This bipartisan support is why fighting privatization is so difficult. American political culture has a strong faith in the efficacy of markets and skepticism in the competence of government. Critics bravely cite individual episodes of privatization gone bad, but there is no compelling philosophical response or alternative grand narrative to the logic of privatization.

An embryonic force to counter the push to privatize is gaining momentum, however: the concept of "the commons." People who rely upon the country's multiple commons have not yet built a shared philosophy, but even so a remarkably broad groundswell of activism is emerging.

The commons describes the many resources we collectively own that are being mismanaged by government or siphoned away by corporations. Some commons are physical assets, such as the global atmo-

sphere, ecosystems, clean water, wildlife and the human genome. Some commons are public institutions such as libraries, museums, and schools. Still other commons are social communities, such as the "gift economies" of people who contribute their time and expertise to create valuable resources. Examples include scientific disciplines and Internet communities, both of which depend on the open exchange of information.

The point of talking about the commons is to reassert a basic truth: Power does not reside in government and markets alone. It also belongs to "we the people." This is not just a rhetorical point. The commons has its own moral authority, social effectiveness and political power – which is why leaders of government and corporations routinely invoke the concept. Power in a democracy must constantly justify its moral and political legitimacy by associating itself with "the people."

To be sure, government often does act as a trustee for the American people, and markets can be efficient tools for material progress. What is too often ignored, however, is that the commons is a sovereign force in its own right. Sometimes the interests of the commons are best protected through its own institutions rather than through government or markets. Such institutions can take many forms: stakeholder trusts, land trusts, professional communities, civic associations, online networks, and cooperative arrangements like blood banks and libraries.

The Alaska Permanent Fund is a terrific example of a stakeholder trust. Every year, the Fund gives every Alaska citizen an equal slice of revenues from oil drilling on state lands. Now with some \$27 billion in assets, the Fund generated dividends of about \$1,107 for every state resident in 2003.

One reason that public libraries, parks and land trusts serve the commons is because they are institutionally designed to serve everyone. Unlike markets, which cater to those with money, a commons generally aims to provide equal access to a resource. Access is a civic or social right, not a privilege reserved for those who can afford it.

An evolving moral economy

Surely the biggest, most robust commons in history is the Internet, which has enabled an unprecedented type of bottom-up creativity and control. The Internet has spawned countless collaborative Web sites, online discussion forums, peer-to-peer file sharing communities and instant messaging networks. Interactions on such commons are not governed by contracts or money changing hands, but by social trust and reciprocity.

The commons, in short, has a different "moral economy" than the market. As any economist will tell you, a market is based on rational individuals maximizing their utility through economic exchange. By contrast, a commons tends to be based on a community of shared values managing a resource according to agreed-upon moral or social norms. The resource may or may not be recognized as saleable property.

The "moral economy" of the commons can be so efficient and creative that it sometimes outperforms the market on its own terms. The GNU/Linux operating system, now used on one-third of the nation's servers, is perhaps the best proof of this fact, along with hundreds of other open source software communities. Countless Web communities achieve valuable types of coordination and collaboration that a market regime, with its expensive legal, marketing and payment apparatus, could not easily match.

This is a key reason online enterprises based on social networking – open source software, peer-to-peer file sharing, instant messaging, viral marketing – are thriving, while conventional enterprises that seek to manipulate and control online consumers are less successful. Online sharing and collaboration is cheap, easy and socially convivial – a reality that "does not compute" in the neo-classical economic model.

Enclosure of the commons

It can be difficult to argue against privatization when the conventional wisdom holds that government is an inept bumbler. Part of this stems from three decades of relentless government-bashing by politicians and corporate PR firms. Government's image also has suffered from its obligation to serve everyone, including difficult, high-cost "customers" (Medicaid patients, rural postal patrons), while companies are free to capture the most profitable customers for themselves. Government bureaucracies are hobbled in other ways – personnel rules, budget limits, no market access to capital – that make them less able to respond nimbly to changing needs.

In the face of such rough currents, opponents of privatization should therefore identify the people, and not the government, as the victim of privatization. Talking about threats to these many commons helps to make a stronger, affirmative case for reclaiming the public's wealth.

A language of the commons more clearly identifies who is being betrayed and offers a richer understanding of what happens when a resource is privatized. In this regard, "en-

closure of the commons" is a useful term. In 18th and 19th century Britain, the aristocratic classes prevailed upon Parliament to seize the meadows, forests and wild game that common people relied upon as a matter of custom. Enclosure is the term describing the appropriation of a resource that belongs to all and its conversion into private property owned and controlled by a wealthy few.

When the commons is enclosed, prices generally rise and people must ask for permission to use a resource previously available to everyone. Enclosure also changes the management and character of a resource. The goal for resources governed by the market is to maximize financial return. When a resource is managed as a commons, the goal

is to secure sustainable long-term benefits for everyone. The resource – wilderness, scientific research, genetic information – does not need to be turned into property and sold; it can be managed in its "non-property" form for everyone.

The Tomales Bay Institute recently prepared a report on "The State of The Commons." The report, which can be downloaded at www.friendsofthecommons.org, describes the scope of our common wealth, surveys the state of six important commons and makes some recommendations for the future.

The good news is that the market value of the broadcast spectrum has increased as the technology for cell phones, pagers and other wireless communication has advanced. So many companies want to use the public's airwaves that the federal government can now extract a great price for it, and put those funds to public use.

There also are opportunities to curb pollution of the global atmosphere while establishing a commons trust fund. A new "Sky Trust" proposal is gaining momentum to require companies to bid at auction for the right to release their carbon emissions into the atmosphere. The money would then be placed into a Sky Trust owned by all citizens. Under this scheme, companies would have financial incentives to reduce their pollution, and the public would reap dividends from the Sky Trust that could be used for public purposes or rebated to individual citizens as dividends, in the style of the Alaska Permanent Fund.

The point of any "commons solution" is to protect our shared resources from expropriation and mismanagement. We need to begin to assign legal rights to our common wealth – our airsheds, aquifers and ecosystems – pressured by markets. We also need to breathe new life into the "public trust doctrine," a legal rule that since Roman times has declared that certain parts of nature belong to the public and cannot be given away by governments or seized by private parties.

Many activists are starting to recognize the strategic value of the commons paradigm, including defenders of fresh-water supplies, wildlife and indigenous cultures. Libraries are talking about saving the "information commons," and a new nonprofit, the Creative Commons, now offers licensing alternatives to copyright to promote the sharing and reuse of music, film and writing. In Vermont, residents have organized themselves as the Kingdom Commons to fight a windmill farm in a pristine wilderness area. Advocates of sustainable fisheries, parks and open spaces, and the public's airwaves are invoking the commons as a way to fight corporate enclosures.

The growing popularity of commons-speak is a hopeful sign. Not only does it reconceptualize the privatization issue, it gives people a way to assert a moral and social connection to resources that belong to us all. Disparate progressive causes that now labor in isolation could begin to recognize their political affinities, and begin to hoist up a new public philosophy with its own power to combat privatization.

David Bollier is author of *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of Our Common Wealth*.

Workers are always the victims of terrorism

The following statement on the March 11 subway bombings in Spain was issued by the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) National Committee:

In Madrid, we have been killed again this 11th March. We, workers, simple people, are the victims once again, this time torn to pieces and in the wildest way. We, workers, simple people, are always the victims of all sort of terrorism, the obvious and the disguised ones; we are victims of precariousness, of unemployment, of poverty, of manipulation, of what are inappropriately called work 'accidents,' we are hostages and cannon fodder in all wars, in all confrontations of interests, of all fanaticisms, of all powers. We are victims of the decisions, the interests and aims of minorities alien to us and who use us as a shield and currency.

In Madrid, in Iraq, in Palestine, in Israel, in Afghanistan, in New York, in Chicago, in Vitoria, in Russia, in Chechnya... they kill us everywhere, for causes which are not ours.

Who the people are behind this particular atrocity is irrelevant; they have hit the weak, the ones who are not able to negotiate, the ones who have no power of decision.

They show their disdain for the working class, the simple people.

If we had any hope that such brutality would not be used, the facts have removed it. We want to say clearly that only workers, simple people, those who have no escort nor armored car – those who do not decide the lives and futures of others – are able to mourn our dead ones; we can say, loudly and with real pain, that we are with the victims and their families, because so we are.

A hug, no words, with the heart, to all those directly affected.

Their world destroys us, let us build ours.

www.cnt.es

Madrid tinged with blood

This morning Madrid woke up tinged with blood. The south of the capital, an area that concentrates the biggest part of the city's working class, was the scenario of one of the most dreadful and wild massacres in its history. Thus, the workers of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo Local Union Federation in Madrid want to state our most sincere and strong rejection of the outrages that took place today in the city where we live and/or

work. The ones behind the massacre have shown that they do not know or at least do not have any sort of class conscience. It seems unreal that, nowadays, fully installed in the 21st century, we still have to keep reminding people that workers are exactly the same here in Madrid as in Cordoba, Barakaldo, La Bisbal, Kandahar or Baghdad.

At this moment, 7.30 p.m., the figures we have give 186 dead... Most of their lives were cut short when they were bound to attend their work places in the capital. We want to express our condolences and solidarity to the victims and their families... It is very hard for us to think that, in addition, many of them were immigrants from inside and outside the peninsula, people who had come to our city, which is everybody's city, to improve their living conditions.

We appeal to all institutions, political parties, unions, media and all other social actors to not to look for any type of profit or advantage for themselves... in the suffering of victims and their families.

Please, do not make a weapon of pain, too.

Madrid Local Federation of Unions

Locomotive Engineers merge into Teamsters union

BY BALTIMORE RED

It is now official. Members of the BLE have voted to join the teamsters union. The engineers union, the oldest – and one of the most conservative – craft unions in the U.S., has been renamed the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLE&T), and will become a division of the newly formed Rail Conference of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Founded in 1863, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers zealously guarded its independence over the years, and since the 1960s repeatedly rebuffed the overtures of the United Transportation Union, the rail industry's largest labor organization, for a marriage of their own.

The irony of the BLE being successfully wooed by the Teamsters is striking. The UTU and the BLE were natural merger partners – between them they represent what is left of the running trades (which at one time included not only engineers and conductors, but also firemen, brakemen and flagmen which have now largely been eliminated). However, the BLE nixed two proposed mergers in recent years; instead merging with a union with little presence on the rails. According to Teamsters President James P. Hoffa, the merger creates “a partnership to strengthen our ability to represent workers across the transportation spectrum.”

Notably, the new BLE&T will now, after 140 years of strict craft exclusivity, actively court trainmen into its once-elite ranks. “The doors are now open and the structure in place,” said BLE&T president Doug Hahs. “We welcome trainmen with open arms.”

The BLE and IBT are already organizing short line railroads throughout the United States. Over the past year, the two organizations have signed up over 700 engineers and trainmen from seven different roads.

And on February 6th, the BLE&T scored a stunning upset victory over the UTU on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Last fall, the UTU petitioned the Canadian Industrial Relations Board for a winner-take-all election on the transcontinental railway, believing that it could easily win such a contest. Given that there are approximately 1,700 engineers at CP and 2,800 trainmen represented by UTU, the UTU was confident of victory.

However, at the time the petition was filed, the UTU leadership had not yet been indicted on federal racketeering charges, and the BLE had yet to merge with the Teamsters. When the vote came down, a majority of 1,687 of the 3,173 votes cast were for the Teamsters' Canada Rail Conference. In a unit

dominated by trainmen represented by UTU, the BLE&T managed to win by 201 votes.

The BLE&T represents the first railroad union under the new IBT “Rail Conference,” and others may follow. The Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees is currently in merger discussions with the IBT, and the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference has already applied for certification to represent BMW members at CP. A similar request is in the works at Canadian National, Canada's other major railway.

Morale in the ranks of the UTU is at an all-time low. In the face of the BLE's merger, the looming scandal involving the UTU past and current leadership, and the startling defeat on the Canadian Pacific, some rank-and-file UTU members are weighing their options.

In such a climate, the BLE&T may begin attempts to actively woo the UTU membership. There is talk of entire locals going over to the BLE&T. Meanwhile, the UTU is being booted from its offices in AFL-CIO buildings due to its unaffiliated status. Most recently, the union's Michigan Legislative Board was evicted from the Michigan AFL-CIO building in Lansing at the behest of the Teamsters and BLE&T.

UTU head pleads guilty to racketeering charges

The president of the United Transportation Union pled guilty to racketeering charges March 11, admitting that he solicited bribes from lawyers trying to get access to lucrative legal work for rail workers.

Byron Boyd was the fourth and final defendant to admit his guilt in a scheme that ran back to 1995. The four men, all former UTU officials, solicited cash from lawyers who wanted to represent injured rail workers in personal injury lawsuits against rail employers. Those are potentially very lucrative suits since there is no limit to legal damages under federal law and conditions on the nation's rail lines are increasingly hazardous.

The 125,000-member UTU also represents workers in the bus, mass transit and airline industries.

“What I have pleaded to is a burden that falls squarely on my shoulders, as it should. To all I am truly sorry for the anguish I have put you through,” Boyd said in a statement released on the union's web site after his plea.

The four officials face a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Former UTU president Charles Little and Boyd each agreed to forfeit \$100,000 in proceeds from the scheme, the other two officials agreed to surrender \$45,000 each.



Two trainmen were killed Feb. 21 after Union Pacific ignored union complaints of understaffing. Four days before the derailment in New Mexico, UP wrote the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, indicating that several engineers were being returned to service in El Paso. But they were not recalled, and a combination of crew fatigue and deteriorating rails led to yet another fatal “accident.”

AFL fronts for boss interests

Meddling in Iraq denounced

Delegates to the California Federation of Teachers annual meeting unanimously approved a resolution March 20 opposing U.S. government funding of the AFL-CIO's international programs. The AFL-CIO is seeking up to \$5 million from the government's National Endowment for Democracy, which has replaced CIA funding of the AFL's international programs, to form employer groups and “unions” in Iraq. The resolution calls for an end to government funding, saying it is incompatible with international solidarity.

“Whereas the National Endowment for Democracy has served as a front for U.S. government foreign policy objectives, including acting in the past as a front for U.S. government intelligence operations and subversive interference in the internal affairs of the labor movements of other countries, and...

“Whereas AFL-CIO acceptance of NED funding for its solidarity work in Iraq would have the appearance, if not the effect, of interfering in the internal affairs of the Iraqi labor movement in furtherance of U.S. government foreign policy objectives,

“Therefore be it resolved that the California Federation of Teachers ... oppose the AFL-CIO and its Solidarity Center seeking or accepting funding from the U.S. government, its agencies and any other institutions which it funds such as the NED for its work in Iraq or elsewhere.”

“Solidarity Center” bolsters coup plotters in Venezuela

BY HARRY KELBER

Hardly any union member knows anything about the AFL-CIO's American Center for International Labor Solidarity, because it operates largely as a clandestine organization. It was established in 1997 to replace four regional organizations whose staffs had worked with CIA agents to destabilize democratically elected governments in the Dominican Re-

public, Guyana and Chile and to undermine unions that were hostile to American business interests.

Solidarity Center promised to be quite different. Its mission statement said: “The Center provides workers and their unions with information about internationally recognized worker rights and basic union skills training... We're raising public awareness of the abuses and exploitation of the world's most vulnerable workers. We're promoting democracy and freedom and respect for workers' rights in global trade, investment and development policies and in the lending practices of international financial institutions. Above all, we're giving the world's workers a chance for a voice in the global economy and in the future.”

Three-fourths of the Solidarity Center's budget comes from government sources, with annual grants from the State Department, the Agency for International Development, the Labor Department and the National Endowment for Democracy. The AFL-CIO also donates a significant amount to the Center.

Center director Harry Kamberis is a former State Department employee, who was a staff member of the American Institute for Free Labor Development during the period of AFL-CIO covert operations abroad.

Solidarity Center maintains offices in at least 26 countries, and continues to work closely with the State Department. In Venezuela, prior to the U.S.-backed coup attempt, Solidarity Center funneled \$154,377 to the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers (CTV), which played a major role in the plot. The Center says the money was spent for internal union elections, but CTV officials say it was used for conducting training courses.

Prior to the coup, the Solidarity Center invited the CTV's head to Washington and arranged for him to visit with government officials. A series of strikes by the CTV paved the way for the “democratic revolution” on April 11, 2002, with pro-U.S. businessman Pedro Carmona selected to run the country. Carmona's first act was to dissolve the National Assembly. Two days later, Chavez was swept back into power, much to the chagrin of the State Department and the White House.

If this is how Solidarity Center operates in Venezuela, we can well wonder what it is doing elsewhere around the world. And we'd like to ask one question of Director Kamberis: How can the Center promote the cause of international labor solidarity if it keeps American workers in the dark about its operations?

B.C. wildcat strike protests lay-off scheme

Workers at Victoria's Royal Jubilee Hospital responded to British Columbia provincial authorities' plans to lay off 1,400 health care workers with a wildcat strike Feb. 24.

Members of the Hospital Employees Union walked out and set up picket lines with supporters from the Community Solidarity Coalition. Despite a heavy police presence, only patients passed through the picket line until workers marched inside and occupied the hospital cafeteria.

The government is cutting the positions as part of a continuing bid to break the union and de-unionize healthcare, contracting out essential services to private firms.



U Penn Teaching Assistants strike

A dozen Wobblies joined picket lines at the University of Pennsylvania Feb. 26. Hundreds of Teaching and Research Assistants struck for two days Feb. 26 and 27, on the one-year anniversary of their union representation election, to demand that administrators allow the National Labor Relations Board to count the ballots. Administrators challenged the election on the grounds that TAs and RAs are not employees. The NLRB impounded the ballots pending the resolution of the legal proceedings. The GET-UP union did not ask other employees to honor picket lines, and for the most part they did not; although few faculty heeded administration suggestions that they cover the strikers' classes. Administrators threatened to discipline any faculty or staff who honored picket lines, prompting an Unfair Labor Practice charge. The IWW represents GET-UP organizing staff.

NLRB “justice” after 16 years

The National Labor Relations Board is distributing more than \$10 million in back and severance pay, medical reimbursements, and other benefits to 95 former Alaska Pulp Corp. workers. The settlement, reached several months ago but only now being implemented, ends 16 years of litigation.

On October 10, 1989, the NLRB ruled that in 1987 APC had illegally refused to reinstate workers at the end of an economic strike, instead offering only entry-level positions to strikers regardless of seniority. As a result, they received lower pay for more difficult work.

A NLRB press release notes that the settlement is the largest in the agency's history. The case illustrates the folly of relying on U.S. labor law, which allowed APC to violate these workers' rights for 16 years while dragging them through interminable legal proceedings.

California grocery workers defeated

Southern California grocery workers have been defeated in their five-month-long dispute with the Albertson's (American), Ralphs (Kroger) and Vons and Pavillions (Safeway) grocery chains. Nearly 60,000 striking and locked-out members of the United Food and Commercial Workers union ratified a settlement Feb. 29 which contains deep concessions.

Wall Street analysts estimate that the dispute cost the chains at least \$2 billion in sales, and as much as \$700 million in lost profits, and will cost tens of millions more as the chains work to regain market share. Before the strike and lock-out, the three chains accounted for nearly 60 percent of all grocery sales in the region.

A two-tier wage and benefit system is being instituted, and returning strikers will have to pay \$5 - \$15 a week toward their health insurance premiums in the third year of the contract. Under the two-tier system, new workers will start at as low as \$8.90 an hour, and see pay scales top out at rates \$3 an hour or more below the current top scale.

As one striker put it, this contract "sold out the new hires, which will screw the current part-timers." In addition to lower wages, new hires will be covered by a health plan that costs them an average of \$450 a year for barebones coverage and will receive only a third as much as the chains had been paying toward pension benefits. (Current employees will see future pension benefits cut by 35 percent.) And the contract allows increased use of outside suppliers to stock shelves.

After ten years without a pay raise, the new three-year contract offers workers lump-sum payments averaging about \$1,000 each in the first and third years of the contract.

The companies say the final contract is very close to their original demands. With an annual labor turnover of about 20 percent, the supermarkets will have a majority of lower-tier workers by the time the new contract expires.

Union officials were quick to claim victory. UFCW International President Doug Dority said it was "one of the most successful strikes in history."

The AFL-CIO's official statement praised the workers' "heroism and commitment" and claimed that they had "saved affordable health care benefits and beat back employer demands to freeze pension funds."

Few workers saw it that way. "Basically, for all those months that we were out there on strike, we should've got a better deal," said Armando Montes.

"I'm really disappointed," added a 27-year Ralphs worker. "We got a reduced pension plan, no raises and less benefits."

In Van Nuys, one worker said he wanted

to vote against the contract but was told by union officials, "If we vote it down, it will only get worse. What kind of choice is that?"

Dozens of workers continue to face criminal charges for picket line "offenses" ranging from blocking scabs from crossing the line to "trespassing" at their workplaces.

Bosses take to the road

The Southern California contract was one of the UFCW's best agreements, as workers there had resisted the last national round of concessions in which many union grocery workers saw starting wages drop to within pennies of the minimum wage.

Now the chains will take their demands for deep concessions on tour. Supermarket union contracts in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Seattle and Northern California will expire within the next six months.

Many Northern California workers are scared that they are next in the grocery chains' assault, and that their union is not prepared for the fight. A contract covering nearly 20,000 workers in California's Sacramento Valley expires in July; another covering more than 30,000 grocery clerks in the Bay Area expires Sept. 11. UFCW officials have said they expect a similar fight up north, but are hoping that stronger community and labor support will strengthen workers' hand.

Although the UFCW was totally unprepared for the fight, workers were still able to impose a heavy cost on the grocery chains. Picketing workers were generally effective at keeping shoppers out of stores until the UFCW decided to pull picket lines from Ralphs, apparently in an effort to let management know they were prepared to give in.

It will take the chains years to recoup their losses on the strike, unless the nearly bankrupt UFCW rolls over in future negotiations. After Safeway reported a quarterly loss of some \$700 million in January, Kroger and Albertsons released 4th quarter figures that scared many investors. Kroger, the country's largest grocery chain, blamed the lock-out and a shorter strike in West Virginia for \$156.4 million of its \$337.4 million loss on the quarter. While #2 Albertsons remained profitable, it said the dispute slashed its fourth-quarter profit by about \$90 million.

The chains' losses would have been much heavier had unions not pulled their punches at every opportunity.

In addition to pulling picket lines from Ralphs and Teamsters workers keeping the chains' warehouses running throughout most of the dispute, the UFCW passed up countless opportunities to spread the strike - or even to use its presence across the country to build consumer pressure on the chains.

On Feb. 13, with the strike floundering,

the UFCW agreed to extend Kroger subsidiary Food 4 Less's Southern California contract, set to expire February 28th.

Across the country, the UFCW extended or settled contracts covering tens of thousands of workers at the three chains. In Arizona, 14,000 UFCW Local 99 members worked without a contract throughout the California fight. In St. Louis, 10,000 UFCW Local 655 members settled after three weeks for a contract that requires larger co-payments for doctor visits and prescription drugs.

The UFCW settled or agreed to mediation in other disputes covering thousands of workers in Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and West Virginia - with many more agreements due to expire soon.

The UFCW's main tactic was appeasement, ranging from its decision not to spread the strike or picket warehouses to the decision to pull picket lines from Ralphs stores. Although public support for the workers was generally strong, the UFCW made little effort at public outreach.

And while some unions made substantial contributions to the strike fund, most were content to let the grocery workers fight on their own. The UFCW apparently decided to pull pickets from the warehouses at the request of Teamsters officials who made resounding declarations of solidarity at press conferences, but balked at actual solidarity on the job. Unions that squandered millions of dollars on the Dean and Gephardt campaigns were nowhere to be seen.

Although AFL-CIO President John Sweeney told thousands of strike supporters: "We cannot and we will not lose ... This is a national fight," the federation waited four months into the strike before taking any noticeable action to support the workers.

As the final negotiations got underway, the AFL finally threatened to launch a boycott of California Safeway stores and the San Francisco Labor Council passed a resolution calling for a one-day solidarity strike up and down the West Coast, to "demonstrate that the labor movement has the power and re-

AFL-CIO 'fights' for survival

"Organized Labor Fights for Survival." That was the headline the Associated Press ran over its March 10 report on the AFL-CIO's annual meeting in the luxury seaside resort of Bal Harbour, Florida.

But it's a very odd kind of fight for a labor organization. Rather than organizing workers or making plans to push back the latest management assault, AFL leaders plan to spend tens of millions of dollars of union dues electing millionaires to political office. Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry - a millionaire in his own right even before he married the heiress to the Heinz ketchup fortune - addressed the meeting by satellite. (The AFL is evidently not important enough to merit a personal appearance.)

The AFL-CIO plans to spend a record \$44 million on federation-wide get-out-the-vote efforts; tens of millions more have already been spent (much of it on Kerry's primary opponents) and much more will be spent in the coming months by affiliated unions.

In the 2000 election, the AFL-CIO spent about \$41 million, with another \$50 million coming from affiliated unions. Almost \$97 million of union members' dues was spent on politicians (mostly Democrats) in 2002, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks political donations.

Meanwhile, union membership continues to fall - now down to 12.9 percent of the work force. AFL-CIO unions lined up more than 350,000 new members last year, but lost more to plant closings and lay-offs and union-busting.

sources to defeat this vicious attack on the standard of living of all workers and to go on the offensive to win affordable universal healthcare for everyone." But by then the strike was already lost.

(Some AFL unions went out of their way to offer succor to the bosses during the dispute. The West Central Illinois Building & Construction Trades Council held a ceremony in February praising Kroger for using union workers on a construction job that employed as many as 75 workers. In Philadelphia, building trades unions organized ral-

lies in support of Wal-Mart - which the UFCW and chains alike blamed for undercutting union conditions in Southern California, though the firm does not presently sell groceries there - after Wal-Mart agreed to use union construction workers on a new store that was facing community opposition.)

This is a fight that could have been won. The grocery chains are heavily dependent not only on public support, but also on still heavily unionized transportation and distribution services. Effective picket lines could have shut the stores down. Nor was there any reason for the UFCW to allow the chains to bankroll the strike with the profits from their other stores across the country.

And the union raised the health care issue only half-heartedly, never posing it as a fundamental right that needed to be extended to all workers. Only in his victory statement, did the UFCW's Dority offer a broader vision, promising that "The UFCW will lead the fight for health care reform. And, I believe, with members like our Southern California members the UFCW will win that fight."

But unless rank-and-file grocery workers organize themselves, they can expect a battered UFCW to agree to similar concessions across the country as contracts come up for negotiation.

In the aftermath of the strike, UFCW President Dority and another top UFCW official "retired." Dority was quickly replaced (without a membership vote) by Joe Hansen, who the UFCW sent to Austin, Minnesota, in 1987 to help bust Local P-9's strike against Hormel. Hansen was appointed trustee and quickly signed a sweetheart deal with the company. That the UFCW executive board decided to put him in charge of the entire union is not a good sign for grocery workers.

It seems the UFCW is returning to its concessionary ways. Grocery workers would do well to keep a firm grip on their wallets.

HERE, UNITE to merge

The executive boards of the garment and hotel and restaurant workers unions agreed to merge the two unions Feb. 25. UNITE, formed in 1995 from a merger of the Intl. Ladies Garment Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers, has 180,000 members; the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) claims 250,000. The two unions also have 400,000 retirees.

UNITE President Bruce Raynor will head the merged union, to be known as UNITE HERE, while HERE's John Wilhelm will head the new union's hospitality division. The *New York Times* reports that the merged union will back Wilhelm in his effort to replace current AFL-CIO President John Sweeney.

Although the two unions are based in very different industries, they said a merger made sense because both are actively working to organize immigrant workers.

Although both unions have lost many members in recent decades (the two garment unions had over a million members at their peak; the hotel union once had 400,000) UNITE remains one of the U.S.'s wealthiest unions, owning the Amalgamated Bank (assets \$3.6 billion) and extensive real estate holdings. UNITE has also received millions from employers wanting to import garments made overseas. HERE, which has hemorrhaged members since Sept. 11, has recently had to curtail its organizing activities.

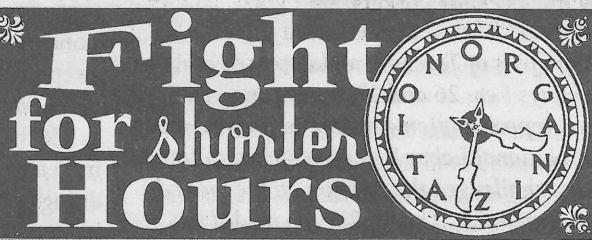
Illinois considers 'new' overtime rule

With the Bush administration poised to issue new overtime regulations March 31, and Congressional leaders refusing to allow measures blocking them to reach the floor, the Illinois legislature is considering a bill to require the state Department of Labor to issue emergency rules preserving the current eligibility standards.

On March 9, Labor Secretary Elaine Chao rejected a call by Republican Senator Arlen Specter (who is facing re-election) to delay implementation of the new rules until a study can determine how many workers would be affected by the change. Unions say 8 million or more workers could lose overtime protection, the Labor Department says only a few thousand would be affected.

Who needs sleep?

The U.S. military is studying a new drug that would make it possible for people



to go without sleep for up to two weeks (studies on rats indicate that's when subjects drop dead) with "no apparent side effects." Scientists speculate that people might be able to get by on as little as two hours of sleep a night as a long-term regimen.

This came up in the context of an NPR radio program on the time crunch facing many workers; the host expressed the reasonable fear that rather than this new "free time" benefitting workers, employers would seize the opportunity to demand an even-longer work day.

Take Back Your Time meet

There's still time to register for the Take Back Your Time Day conference being held in Chicago June 10-13. Details and a registration form are at www.timeday.org.

Wireless Wobblies, Proletarian Palmtops

BY ERIC LEE

Unions are rarely, if ever, on the bleeding edge of technology. If you're ever nostalgic to see what computers looked like several years ago, just wander into a trade union office. For many reasons (and not only budget) unions have been reluctant to invest in information technology on the same scale as corporations do.

A couple of years ago, a union official allowed me to use her PC to do a bit of work on the web and after a short while I realized that I was using a very old version of Internet Explorer. Just out of curiosity, I thought I'd check out the union's own website. Because of the browser I was using, I couldn't actually see the union's site – nor could the person whose desk I was using.

A few weeks ago, I visited a trade union branch office in a large insurance company. There were computers everywhere, mobile phones, all the latest gadgets. But the union's own connection to the Internet was through a modem that belonged in a museum, not an office. Connection speeds were so slow that we were unable to download the software we needed to continue our work. Eventually, a couple of us went out to a magazine store and picked up a magazine with a CD in it, taking the software we needed from that.

Trade unionists often drag around the heaviest laptops you've ever seen, or work at desks with the smallest and lowest-resolution screens you'll ever find in an office. Union staffers usually have to accept that IT is considered a luxury and that buying the latest gadgets is a waste of members' money.

Which is often true. I've heard of union officers demanding to be given the latest



palm-top computers, only to discover that they actually had no use for them. Of course unions should be extremely careful with how they spend their limited resources. Buying “toys for boys” should not top any union's priority list.

But sometimes a technology comes along that fits the needs of the trade union movement like a glove. I think that the wireless Internet experienced through hand-held computers is just such a technology.

An ideal tool for unionists, and for organizers in particular, would be light and mobile, with an extremely fast connection to the Internet. It would give organizers access to their email and to the web. Indeed, it could do much more than that, including play MP3 files or give them access to Internet radio stations, or have a built-in digital camera, but let's get down to the essentials. Imagine a device that did all the necessary things – word processing, spreadsheets, a calendar, a to-do list, a database of contact details. All hooked up at extremely high speed to the net.

Such a device would probably be used in addition to, and not as a replacement for, a desktop PC.

Wouldn't such a device make our lives as organizers and campaigners easier? It would – but with a couple of caveats.

First of all, to use such a device, the Internet would have to be “in the air” – that is to say, widely accessible through wireless networks. This is rapidly becoming the case.

There are many thousands of wireless “hotspots” around the world, some of which you have to pay to use, many of which are free of charge.

And second, such a device would have to cost less – substantially less – than the clunky laptops and aging desktop PCs so many of us use.

The fact is that such devices have begun to come onto the market, and their prices are rapidly falling. The first Palm device to include built-in high-speed wireless access now sells in the U.S. for less than \$460. There are alternative devices, using Microsoft's Pocket PC operating system, Linux or even the RIM Blackberry, but these all do basically the same thing: they make Internet-assisted mobile organizing and campaigning possible.

Activists armed with such devices – and with a knowledge of how to find the “hot-spots” where they can get high-speed Internet access – will have in their pockets a tool of unimaginable power. The latest inexpensive palm-tops have more computing power and more memory than desktops did five years ago.

And because they are light and boot up instantly, one tends to use them more – and to use them everywhere.

Activists, unhooked from their desktops and telephone lines, will be able to work as never before. We have already seen examples of this in the way SMS (short text messages) have been used by campaigners before and during demonstrations. Wireless palmtops will offer far more capabilities than this.

With the available of these new, inexpensive gadgets, and the rapid spread of wireless hotspots, we are entering a new era in labour's use of the Internet.

cause they were blocked from decent jobs, because they were desperately poor, and because unions did not reach out to their communities to build a common struggle for decent living and working conditions. In many strikes, unions have successfully reached out to scabs, persuading them to join the strike and stand with their fellow workers.

We need to confront scabs – and scabbery – of course, but particularly given the labor movement's present condition we need to confront them in ways that invites them to reflect on what they are doing and recognize their common interests as workers.

Condemning people – even scabs – because of their criminal records (as if a conviction for drug use was in any way as serious a crime as scabbery) is not only ineffective, it sends a very dangerous message.

Any kind of decent society needs to work to bring offenders back into the community, to invite people to change and heal, not to stigmatize them for life as unfit to associate with “decent” workers. And (especially in a town like Jefferson), we need to be aware of the racial implications of stigmatizing an entire generation of prisoners.

Scabbing is a crime against our common humanity. It's unacceptable, whether committed by “upstanding citizens,” drug addicts, former prisoners, or, as is too often the case, our fellow union members – like the ones who kept Tyson's production lines humming across the country, hauled scab products to market, and stocked Tyson products on the shelves.

Defeating scabs and scabbery requires building solidarity. And solidarity is ultimately the only way to rebuild a labor movement that now includes only one in 12 workers in private industry.

Access to online safety info cut back

BY SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN COALITION ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH (SEMCOSH)

OSHA has a very useful tool on their web site. If you click on “Inspection Data” at www.osha.gov you can look up OSHA violations by employer, industry code or citation number (or from www.semcosh.org you can click our link ‘OSHA Violation Finder’). You can find information about your own employer or industry. More information could be available, but it is a very useful tool and a good use of computer technology.

Until recently you could use this tool any time of any day.

Now it can only be used between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. in the Eastern Time Zone, Monday through Friday. That means if you work dayshift in Detroit and don't want to leave cyber-tracks on the company computer, you just can't use the violations finder. If you live in Hawaii you can use the service between 1 a.m. and 11 a.m.

Jordan Barab of the Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board suggests this explanation: “Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao has told the computers that because of DOL's new overtime regulations, the computers would no longer be receiving overtime pay. So they went on strike. Or were locked out.”

Maybe. Or maybe someone figured out that workers were using the service after work and on the weekends to research their employers. If the service is only available when workers are working (in most of the country) or sleeping (in Hawaii and Alaska) it won't be used for that purpose.

20% of Australians in dire poverty

A new report by an Australian Senate committee reveals that one in five Australians lives in poverty. The inquiry found 21 percent of Australians survive on less than AUS\$400 a week. (The Australian dollar trades at about 75 cents U.S.)

“It is true that ... the rich have got richer,” conceded Prime Minister John Howard. “But it is not true that the poor have got poorer.”

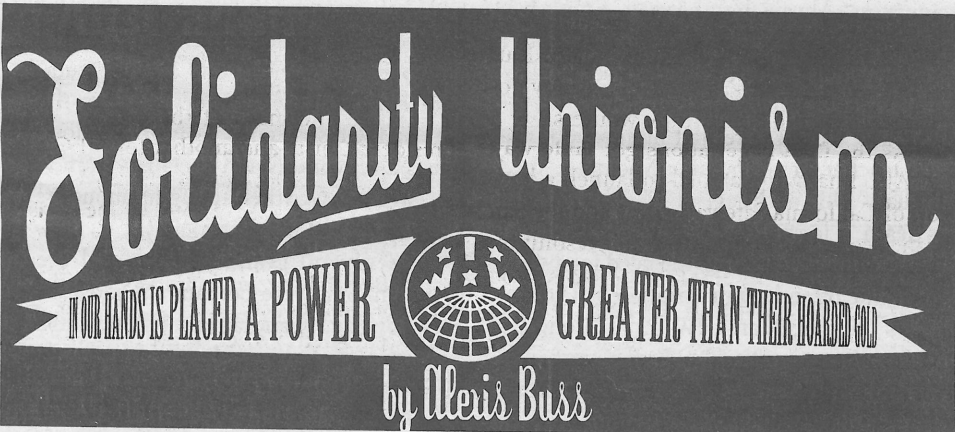
One million Australian workers are classed as poor, despite living in households where at least one adult works. Half a million workers are unable to pay their bills on time, and some 60,000 go without meals because they can not afford them.

The ACTU union federation said it fears development of a U.S.-style massive “working poor.” ACTU Secretary Greg Combet said: “The data reveals a disturbingly high level of financial pressure among ‘working poor’ Australians – families whose main source of income is wages.”

The federation is calling for an increase in the minimum wage. “Profits in industries reliant on award workers such as hospitality and retail have risen up to ten times faster than wages,” Combet said.

“It is appalling to think that low paid workers as well as their families and children are going without meals and yet the Federal Department of Employment would stoop to using misleading evidence so as to deny working families a decent pay rise.”

The Senate inquiry found that the income of poor households fell 10 percent between 1984 and 1999, while the top 20 percent of Australians enjoyed a 1 percent increase in their disposable income.



I read with interest the discussion of the Tyson Foods strike end-up by Fellow Worker Bernhard in the March *Industrial Worker*. It made me recall the Tyson worker who came to the Upper Mid-West Wobbly gathering in Milwaukee last June to talk about their struggle, and then our trip to attend a rally of the strikers the next day.

When the brother from UFCW Local 538 spoke to us, I remember how he particularly talked about the need he and his fellow strikers felt to fight the proposal the company was making to reduce wages and eliminate pensions for new hires.

It really impressed me, since this kind of concession is one of the “easier” ones to make, because it doesn't directly affect the present workforce, whose wages would be untouched. Instead the sons and daughters of their community would have to bear the brunt of the wage cut at the start of their working life.

It was great to hear it then, and it made even more sense the next day when I got a look at Jefferson, Wisconsin. The town, like so many towns these days, didn't exactly have the feeling of economic prosperity.

I felt great that I was going to support a strike where the workers took a position against a “Scabs for Hire” sign being hung on the local high school. Showing young people that they have a future is some of the best work the labor movement can do. I don't often feel that hope when I talk to workers ten years younger than me. Too many predict low-wage, insecure work for the rest of their lives. Why has this happened? How can we restore hope?

When we got to the rally, our contingent was greeted with a lot of smiles. “Oh, look, it's the Wobblies!” I heard people saying.

At the rally we all got copies of an open letter that the president of the local, Michael Rice, wrote to John Tyson, chairman of the board of Tyson Foods. Brother Rice's letter discussed the hiring of scabs who the union had determined were ex-cons.

Here's a part of it:

“You have employed and/or are employing at our plant habitual criminals who have been convicted of being drug pushers, drug users, bail jumpers, domestic abusers, and thieves. These people have served hard time at our expense, and now your company is using them to help destroy our standard of living. And these are just those who have committed felonies. Two people, in recent days, were arrested in the plant by the local police on outstanding misdemeanor warrants. We are working to identify still more scabs about whom we have growing evidence share similar backgrounds.”

This letter gave me the creeps.

Is it right to scab? Of course not. But the rhetoric in Brother Rice's letter, if taken to its logical conclusion – that people who have spent time in prison have no business looking for work – would mean that we might as well hang a sign on every prison in this country that reads “Scabs for Hire.”

But there are choices that the labor movement can make when dealing with people who are scabbing.

I don't believe that there are people who are born scabs. Scabs are made from desperation. Historically, people have scabbed be-

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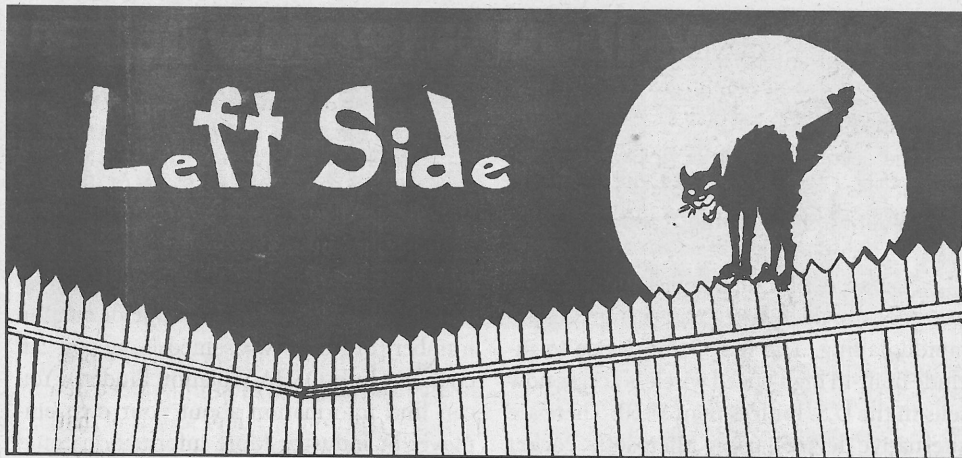
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There has been talk of cloning human embryos rumbling from North Korea of late, where the types of humans can be turned out to fit the decrees of those who are doing the cloning. Opposition to such procedures is being voiced by certain religious groups, and even though I find myself agreeing with a religious group, I still can only say: haven't we been cloned enough already? Ever since that obscure epoch in our quixotic history when there were those of us too lazy to do our own thinking, we had no trouble encountering those who were more than anxious to do our thinking for us and have endured a steady barrage of cloning ever since.

We have had a long and sad history of kings, emperors, popes and psycho-analyzers who work overtime to make sure that we never realize the potential in ourselves. Not only that, but they have carefully organized their constabulary to make sure we toe the line. Those on top have too much to lose if they have any slip-ups. If there are those of us who successfully expose their machinations, they can really come down hard. We have Spartacus, Joe Hill and Leonard Peltier as prime examples.

After all, if they can jump out of windows when they find out they are no longer millionaires, you can well imagine how they feel about the rest of us. They would rather the whole thing go down the drain than lose their positions of privilege. But, by the same token, what the hell do the rest of us have to lose? Wars after wars, bad economic conditions, deteriorating environmental resources... What kind of air are our future generation's children going to breathe?

It is time we should not be concerned about who is going to be the next clown in the not-so-White House, or who's going to be the next pope or the next king of England. We should be more concerned about what we as workers are producing, and who we are producing it for. This planet of ours is too damn precious to be left in the hands of those whose only motivation is greed.

— C.C. Redcloud

Film Review: The Passion of the Christ

BY F.N. BRILL

Whenever the economy is about to tank and middle-income Americans are slipping into poverty, a wave of populist evangelical Christianity sweeps the U.S. 1820s, 1880s, 1920s, 1970s and now. How convenient. We're going to hell on earth, but at least there's pie in the sky when you die.

And along comes the movie event of two millennia ago, "The Passion of the Christ," in surround-sound Aramaic. Nothing can get the American population to go to a subtitled movie like seeing their god getting the crap kicked out of him. I understand that the movie's director, Mel Gibson, had wanted to use Chumbawamba's anarchist anthem, Tubthumper as the end theme – you remember: "I get knocked down, I get up again, you're never going to keep me down." But the Chumba's turned him down and besides, the main character hasn't got up again.

Blasphemy aside, "The Passion of the Christ" isn't a religious movie so much as a massive ideological attack. Turning the working class adage of solidarity – "an injury to one is an injury to all" – upside down, Christ the movie, says "An injury to one is a relief to us all." Idolizing Christ's martyrdom, we are encouraged to stoically bear the blows which daily rain down upon us. We don't have to do anything 'cause Jesus did it for us. It's all in god's plan. "Well honey, the house has been repo'd but at least we're saved."

Likewise the ultra-right wing Gibson's political agenda is fairly plain to see. Christ symbolizes the U.S., bleeding for the world's sins. 9/11, stumble, Afghanistan, whip! Iraq, get up and carry the cross again. Why have thou forsaken us? This mindset reminds me of the dreary day dreams of adolescence, where you picture yourself dying and then everybody will be sorry for you. I guess we could eat a diet of worms, but alas, Mel's a Catholic.

Out of the many Christ's to choose, why would Gibson choose the one he did? Since

'HE STIRRETH UP THE PEOPLE'



JESUS CHRIST

THE WORKMAN OF NAZARETH
WILL SPEAK
AT BROTHERHOOD HALL
— SUBJECT —

— THE RIGHTS OF LABOR —

the one true religion has more than 22,000 variations, somebody's got to be wrong and it must be the neighbors. Gibson reconciles Christ to Gibsonism by turning Jesus into Mel Gibson's mouthpiece from on high.

One could have chosen the Jesus who threw the money changers out of the temple. If Christians must act in Christ's steps, that's the guy we need to emulate. If the Bible is the direct word of god, why not encourage a Jubilee, a freeing from the system of interest, taxes and slavery. It's been several thousand years since Christianity has preached that aspect of the word of god. That's the Jesus I want to see.

Gibson's Jesus is a Judas.

San Francisco airport workers demand their own union

Dozens of airport screeners and baggage handlers marched to the offices of their contractor, Covenant Aviation Security, in South San Francisco, March 5 demanding that they be allowed to choose their own union.

Carrying placards that read "better health care" and chanting "sick policies must go," workers demanded recognition of SEIU Local 790, which was barred from a recent union representation ballot by the National Labor Relations Board. Instead, the NLRB allowed only the new United Screeners Association on the ballot. Workers voted that union down 582 - 200. "We need a strong union to help us get the company to listen to our problems," said Gene Chan, an airport screener at SFO.

Covenant refuses to recognize the union, saying it must abide by the NLRB decision.

Farewell, Fellow Workers

Sidney Solomon

BY RAYMOND SOLOMON

I am saddened to report the death of my father, Sidney Solomon (1911-2004) in New York March 1. He was one of the moving forced behind the anarchist magazine *Vanguard* during the 1930s, and later the newspaper *Spanish Revolution*, almost alone in accurately reporting the anarcho-syndicalist revolution in Spain.

A book designer by trade, FW Solomon was born in Minsk but soon fled with his family to escape Tsarist oppression. Always a rebel, as a boy he rebelled against the authoritarian "socialist" milieu in New York City, leaving YPSL to join the Vanguard group.

He resumed his activism in his later years, joining the IWW and helping to launch the Atlantic Anarchist Circle and the journal *Free Voices*. He proudly wore his IWW hats until the end. I, my wife Judy, and his sister Mildred survive him.

New York's Bluestockings bookstore is planning an exhibition of FW Solomon's paintings to open in late March.

Frank Girard

BY MATTHEW CLARK

"So, what are you doing for the revolution?" This question was often heard from Frank Girard, a devoted family man, friend, teacher, economic justice advocate, and fellow worker. An outspoken socialist, Frank knew both large- and small-scale action play an important role in changing society. He ran for Congress several times as a Socialist Labor Party candidate, and he influenced one person at a time in school and the community about the fundamentals of class consciousness. Always lighthearted, Frank had a crafty, yet genuine, sense of humor about a serious issue: making the world a better place by smashing capitalism.

Frank Girard, a retired high school English teacher in Grandville, Michigan, died February 19th, at the age of 77. The cause of his death, a form of cancer related to asbestos exposure, exemplifies the need for awareness of the often harmful practices of corporations (see the March IW, p. 9, "Congress attacks asbestos victims"). Frank worked as a machine operator and heat treater in Grand Rapids-area factories before becoming a teacher in 1962. Yes, Frank's life, and the cause of his death, leaves a great inspiration to educate, organize and emancipate.

Frank was a dedicated IWW member in the Grand Rapids Area GMB (always at the meetings 15 minutes early). I will always remember this man, who would say "Keep smiling!" to folks when parting ways. In Frank's later years, his beliefs fell in line with the

IWW rather than political parties like the SLP. He worked in the party, since the 1940s, to spread the message of class consciousness and worker control of industry, and his "running against capitalism" campaigns attracted few votes but spread the socialist message.

However, after confronting the authoritarian ways of a party official, Frank was expelled, with the rest of the Grand Rapids section following. Frank was still an outspoken opponent of the capitalist ruling class, but when I knew him he also spoke out against the state (and voting), knowing that it can not protect worker's rights, and that political parties are no substitute for direct action.

After leaving the SLP, Frank launched the *Discussion Bulletin*, which for several years provided a forum for nonauthoritarian socialists to exchange ideas on building a new society. He also founded the Society for Economic Equality, a discussion and education group of local activists. The group, also known as SEE, then formed a public access television show, called "Oh Say Can You SEE," which airs live and invites callers to discuss economic issues, worker's rights, the economic causes of war, and the need for alternatives to capitalism. The show is Frank's legacy and is an important radical viewpoint in the local media that is otherwise missing. SEE-TV is still going strong and the discussion group continues to meet every week. Frank's presence and input is sorely missed but we will continue his vision onward.

I attended the funeral service Feb. 21st, and was glad to see that it was not religious, as Frank disliked organized religion. Instead, the service was living evidence of the scope of his life: the diversity of people there who had been enriched from knowing Frank, the memories and emotions expressed as they got up to speak, one by one. Former students said that Frank was the best teacher they'd ever had. Close friends, as well as fellow activists and workers and socialists from various circles, spoke their thoughts about Frank and his vision for a just society.

His several grandchildren and great-grandchildren were perhaps the most influenced by their grandfather, and one said that her love of nature came from time spent with him. Frank was an enthusiastic gardener. He lived the reality that a sensible land ethic, together with active tending to the Earth, can also answer the question, "So, what are you doing for the revolution?" Indeed, this man helped to create an important realization: The time has come for everyone to be able to answer this question for themselves.

Frank is survived by his wife, Frieda, and their five children, Tom, Ken, Dan, Diane Knight, and Janet Hittle.

Two-tier contract at American Axle

The United Auto Workers has signed a new contract with American Axle that slashes the hourly wages paid to new employees at the auto parts maker. The four-year contract covers more than 6,500 workers in New York and Michigan. The agreement ended a one-day strike that wreaked havoc on General Motors pickup truck production. GM is American Axle's largest customer.

Many workers voted against the two-tier pay scheme, which follows the UAW's new national pattern under which parts plants are being granted massive concessions for new hires in exchange for keeping current employees' earnings intact. (Though in several cases current employees, too, have taken major concessions as the UAW traded workers' pay and work rules for representation rights.)

New hires at American Axle will make \$12 an hour less than current workers, although they will receive the same health care benefits. The UAW says it also got language banning plant closings and a \$5,000 signing bonus for the workers who voted in second-class wages for their future co-workers.

Police fight plan for Lucy Parsons Park in Chicago

Chicago's police union is fighting a proposal to rename a park at 4712 W. Belmont, on the city's Northwest Side, after IWW co-founder Lucy Parsons, described by a 19th century police official as "more dangerous than a thousand rioters."

Fraternal Order of Police local president Mark P. Donohue wrote the Park District that he was "disappointed and disheartened" by plans to name the park after Lucy Ella Gonzales Parsons – the widow of Albert Parsons, who was hanged by the state in 1887 for his role in Chicago's anarchist movement and labor struggles for the 8-hour day.

Lucy Ella Gonzales, who was of mixed black, Mexican and American Indian ancestry, was born in Texas, possibly as a slave. After the Civil War she married Confederate Army veteran Albert Parsons. They moved to Chicago to escape racial prejudice in Texas, and took up the anarchist cause after experiencing working conditions in the city.

On May 1, 1886, the two led a march of 80,000 workers that kicked off local strikes to win the eight-hour day.

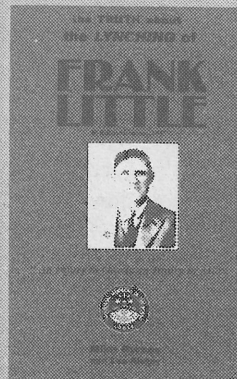
BOOKS FOR REBELLIOUS WORKERS

The Truth about the Lynching of Frank Little

by Mike Byrnes and Les Rickey

This is the first book-length treatment of the August 1, 1917, lynching of IWW organizer Frank Little during a miners' strike in Butte, Montana. The authors, both long-time Butte residents, have tracked down contemporary historical records and newspaper accounts – and several photographs reproduced here for the first time – to offer a definitive answer to the question of who killed Fellow Worker Little, and why. A richly detailed narrative of the event that transformed Butte and crushed the IWW presence in Montana's mining industry.

127 pages, signed by the authors, \$16.95



Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune

by Gay Gullickson

An analysis of the representations (in art and literature) of the women who played a central role in the insurrection known as the Paris Commune. The opponents of the revolution sought to demonize those women, both for their political role and for the way in which they implicitly challenged the constraints society sought to impose on women's lives. The Communards, too, looked to these women – but as harbingers of a new society, liberty leading the people to freedom. This identification of women and revolution, for France's rulers, underlined the dangers of a movement that sought to turn the social order on its head, and so justified the savage repression that followed.

283 pages, \$12.00



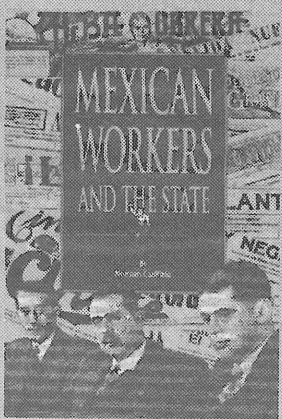
Mexican Workers and the State: From the Porfiriato to NAFTA

by Norman Caulfield

In contemporary Mexico, as during the Porfiriato, the forces of global capitalism are transforming labor, the political system, and other sectors of society. The situation has generated political fragmentation, popular uprisings, violence, militarization and a volatile economy. Within this context, organized labor seeks to redefine itself. Caulfield's book, which contains extensive work on the IWW's cross-border organizing, helps readers understand the importance of independent, internationalist, working class movements. Especially of interest in comparison to current events in Iraq

and Venezuela, is the discussion of the AFL's efforts to promote and build up unions friendly to American interests.

180 pages, \$15.00

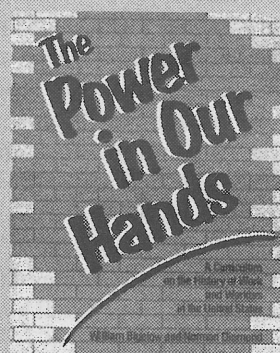


The Power in Our Hands

by William Bigelow and Norman Diamond

Curriculum materials for middle and high school teachers on the history of work and workers in the United States, including units on workers rights, exploitation, scientific management, the Homestead and Lawrence strikes, racial conflict and the labor movement, labor songs, and more. Includes lesson plans, hand-outs for students, and other resources.

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Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World

by Salvatore Salerno
Salerno's book is about one of the most significant traits of the IWW: the union's use of cultural expressions like songs, poems and cartoons to educate and unify workers. Dozens of examples help us understand what mattered to the immigrants, artists, and Wobly intellectuals whose work filled the IWW press. **220 pages, \$22.00**



Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls and the Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century

by Howard Zinn, Dana Frank & Robin D. G. Kelley

Zinn recounts the story of the strike that culminated in the Ludlow Massacre; Frank takes us to a sit-down strike in a Detroit Woolworth's during the Great Depression, and Kelley tells of a movie theater musicians strike in New York City as talkies replaced live music. These strikes raise questions about class and how it is defined, about solidarity and its limits, and about the possibilities for struggle when the odds seem insurmountable. **174 pages, hardcover, \$10.00**



Don't Be a Scab poster

Duotone reproduction of strike supporters 17"x22" **\$5.50**

Where have the jobs gone?

continued from page 1

jobs because the hundreds of thousands of new jobs in factories serving global markets were offset by millions of lay-offs at older state-sector plants.) "There's no denying that manufacturing is declining on a global basis," said Joseph Carson, Alliance's director of economic research.

Automation and intensified work, and the skyrocketing productivity they propel, mean that employers simply need fewer workers to get the job done. Some of that increased productivity is going to military production, some to the still growing financial and service sectors, but the bottom line is that millions of jobs are simply disappearing.

The Bush administration has a novel solution: they are considering reclassifying millions of fast food jobs as manufacturing jobs in order to define away the 2.7 million manufacturing jobs lost since Bush took office. But statistical games won't pay the rent for the millions of workers now trying to survive on part-time and temporary wages, or on their expiring unemployment benefits.

Even telephone answering, tax preparation and computer support jobs are vanishing – sometimes automated out of existence altogether, often moved overseas, and more often a combination of the two. University of California researchers report that high tech jobs are particularly likely to be shipped overseas. Forrester Research projects that nearly 300,000 service jobs had gone overseas by the end of 2003, and another 3 million will be exported by 2015. High-speed communications, endemic unemployment around the world, and massive global wage disparities make it both possible and profitable to move growing numbers of jobs. When highly skilled computer programmers can be hired in India for less than a fifth of the cost of doing the work in the United States, employers will follow the dollar sign. Hewlett-Packard now has 8,000 workers in India, and many other companies are following suit.

Are teachers terrorists?

BY ERIC LEE

I had to read this story twice to be sure it wasn't a joke.

At a private meeting with U.S. governors in the White House Feb. 23, George Bush's Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, called the National Education Association – America's largest national teachers' union, with 2.7 million members – a "terrorist organization."

The union responded by saying that "it is morally repugnant to equate those who teach America's children with terrorists."

Obviously. But the really frightening part of the NEA response reads: "This is the kind of rhetoric we have come to expect from this Administration whenever one challenges its worldview."

In the USA of 2004, when a cabinet member calls a group a "terrorist organization," that's a highly explosive term. As they used to say in the Wild West, "them's fightin' words."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for John Kerry, who recently won the unanimous support of the AFL-CIO in his bid for the presidency, called on Paige to apologize: "These remarks are inappropriate, particularly at a time when our nation has experienced the devastation caused by terrorism."

Inappropriate? Is that the strongest word one can think of?

Paige has issued a brief apology, which begins: "It was an inappropriate choice of words to describe the obstructionist scare tactics the NEA's Washington lobbyists have employed against No Child Left Behind's historic education reforms..."

Maybe it's just me, but I think we cannot accept that a cabinet member in the U.S. government can call a trade union a "terrorist organization." And a simple apology is hardly the appropriate response. The apology should come from President Bush, following an announcement that he has fired his Education Secretary.

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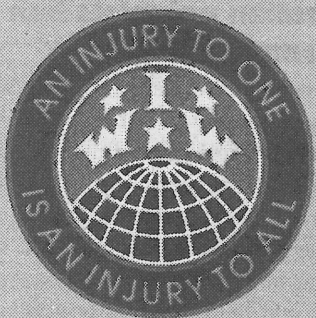
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Haiti: garment workers face attack

BY CAMPAIGN FOR LABOR RIGHTS

Thirty-four SOKOWA (Sendika Ouvriye Kodevi Wanament - Ouanaminthe Codevi Workers' Union) members were assaulted and fired at gunpoint March 2nd in the Codevi Free Trade Zone in Ouanaminthe, Haiti. Ouanaminthe is on the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and Dominican soldiers held the workers at gunpoint while their work badges were being seized.

Workers had demanded union recognition Feb. 16. One unionist was fired Feb. 25 during informal talks with management, and beaten with rifle butts when he refused to leave the plant. Workers struck the next day, demanding his rehiring and termination of the two managers responsible for the incident. The worker was reinstated, but on March 1 one of the managers responsible for the beating walked the assembly line informing workers that Levi Strauss was withdrawing its orders because of the union activity, and that many workers would be fired. In the end, only union members were terminated.

On March 3rd, during a demonstration protesting the firings, members of the rebel army arrived to rough up the workers. The rebels later revealed that they had been contacted by factory management who told them that the workers were going to make problems the next day and gave them a list of union members that they were to get rid of.

UAE workers beat boss after going 8 months without pay

Three construction workers were arrested after confronting supervisors over unpaid wages. The three are charged with beating the site engineer, ramming a loader into a wall at the job site, and waving a knife at officials.

They were part of a group of 90 workers in the United Arab Emirates who have approached local officials several times seeking help in collecting wages that have gone unpaid for up to eight months.

Local news reports said some workers admitted they turned violent after repeated complaints fell on deaf ears. One worker said stress-induced violence has become frequent in their workplace and at their dormitory.

Management had earlier agreed to pay off the arrears, but then stopped payments saying workers were not working hard enough.

Unpaid wages are a growing problem throughout the UAE, provoking several strikes in recent months. Much of the country's construction work is done by migrant workers, and employers are calling on the government to deport "troublemakers."

Indian general strike defends union rights

BY ALL INDIA STATE GOVT
EMPLOYEES FEDERATION

It is a magnificent struggle of the working class to defend democracy when it is under severe attack. The Feb. 24 All India strike to reassert the right to strike has been an unprecedented success. The strike was called in response to the massive victimization of the employees and teachers in Tamilnadu in July 2003 and the Supreme Court's ruling against the strike on 6 August.

Participation has been tremendous all over India. Not less than 8 million state employees joined this strike, alongside millions of other government employees. It is a new record of unity and growing level of consciousness of the employees.

Particularly notable was the strong participation of workers in Gujarat, which has suffered from communal polarization.

The All India State Govt. Employees' Federation warmly congratulates the state employees of all categories for making the countrywide general strike to reassert the right to strike a challenging success. The exemplary unity the employees have shown on this democratic demand is an unparalleled development in the trade union movement.



Thailand: 50,000 protest privatization

"Will we go for privatization? No!" "Will we sell? No!" "Selling water and electricity is like killing all Thai's!" 50,000 workers chanted these and other slogans in front of Thailand's Government House March 10. The government seeks to privatize state enterprises including electricity services, water, ports, public transport, etc. Parts of the airline, telecommunication, postal service and petroleum industries were privatized last year.

The prime minister promised unions that he would not privatize state enterprises three years ago, during his campaign, but promises to the poor are easily forgotten. When unions mobilized for hearings on the priva-

tization scheme, police sprayed pepper and tear gas at the crowd in the hearing room.

The government now says it will consult with unions before proceeding with more privatizations, but unions are demanding that the schemes be taken off the table. Union head Sirichai Mai-ngam notes that "in the past government postponed privatization when workers protested but kept coming back. This time we have two firm demands, first to stop privatisation, second to cancel all the bills drafted under the instruction of the IMF due to loan engagement conditions. Since we already paid all of the debt, we now can cancel the loan engagement conditions."

Swedes demand free public transport

As part of a campaign demanding free public transportation, Sweden's Syndicalist Youth Federation (SUF) is setting up an insurance pool. Riders who take direct action by refusing to pay fares will pay a small amount into a fund which will then cover fines for those who are caught freeriding.

The SUF says similar schemes have been successfully tried by students in some college towns. "The difference is that we have a greater goal than just helping each other to freeride. We want free public transportation, owned by us together and controlled by the workers in it."

"Free public transportation is a way of taking from the richest and giving to the rest of us. It is about time for that kind of redis-

tribution in our segregated cities.

"And think about the socioeconomic gains that could be achieved by getting rid of all the ticket lines, tickets and control systems. Lots of money goes to these systems which leads to nothing but a bad mood in our common spaces.

"In the long run free public transportation would lead to other positive effects, like a better urban environment with less traffic jams. Today car traffic is prioritized at the expense of public transportation. Roads are financed by tax money and are free to use, but the public transportation is financed by fares. It is rather strange that the authorities punish those who choose the means of travel that suits the environment best."

China: Textile strikes lead to arrests

BY CHINA LABOUR BULLETIN

Six workers from the Tieshu Textile Factory in Suizhou City have been arrested and charged with the crime of "disturbing social order," following a mass protest on Feb. 8 in which 1,200 fellow Tieshu workers blocked the main railway line through Suizhou and occupied the factory premises for several hours. The protest was violently broken up by hundreds of armed police.

The arrests suggest that the Suizhou government has decided to end by force the 15-month-long peaceful campaign by the Tieshu textile workers to recover more than 200 million Yuan in back wages, redundancy payments, worker shares and other entitlements still owed to them by the bankrupt factory's management.

The wife of Wang Hanwu, one of the six workers formally arrested, said that her husband had done nothing more than make several speeches at the side of the railway line and had not taken part in the actual blockade. Wang has reportedly been accused by the police of "inciting" the workers' protest.

According to reliable CLB sources, a second arrested worker, Zhu Guo - a former army officer who joined the Tieshu factory after being demobilized from the PLA - was not even present at the protests. He is believed to have been arrested because of comments he made on behalf of the workers during earlier meetings with the factory's managers.

The identity of the four other Tieshu workers arrested is not yet known. The charge on which all six are said to have been arrested - "disturbing social order" - covers a wide range of offences that are punishable by anything from one to ten years' imprisonment.

Around 20 workers were detained in the course of a city-wide manhunt by police in the days following the violent crackdown on

the Tieshu textile workers. Eight workers were held, without due process of law, in a Suizhou hotel for five days and made to undergo a "study class" on criminal law before being released.

At least three others were sentenced without trial to "reeducation through labor." One, 56-year-old Chen Xiuhua, was later found to be suffering from a heart condition and was sent home "on medical bail."

Another, Wei Yiming, was detained during the railway blockade and sentenced without trial to one and a half years' "reeducation through labor." The main charge against him stemmed from a statement he made while the PSB Chief was addressing the assembled workers through a bull horn. Wei said: "You [police officers] get two or three thousand Yuan a month, while we laid-off workers don't even get enough to eat. If the factory would simply pay us the redundancy money they promised us, we'd call off this protest right away." Four police officers rushed forward and detained Wei on the spot.

The government initially claimed these were "Falun Gong cases," in an attempt to bolster the credibility of the crackdown in the eyes of the provincial authorities.

Death squads in Ukraine?

The son of the president of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU) was kidnapped March 7 from a bus stop by masked men believed to be linked to the government. The attack came soon after a KVPU press conference on "the life and death of democracy" denouncing serious violations of union rights. Andriy Volynets was struck twice on the head, and lost consciousness. After his release he was hospitalized for concussion and internal bleeding. His injuries are said to be life threatening.

Teachers unionists arrested

Burundian gendarmes arrested leaders of two teachers' unions March 9 after they met with striking teachers in the capital, Bujumbura. Officials of the Union of Burundi Educational Workers and the Free Union of Burundi Education were taken to a jail operated by the government's intelligence services.

President Domitien Ndayizeye ordered security forces to take action earlier that day. "We cannot tolerate this, I order security forces to arrest and put in jail teachers or students who behave as troublemakers," he said.

Some 5,000 secondary school teachers struck Jan. 5 to demand the government honour a promised salary increase. Another 15,000 primary school teachers joined the strike Feb. 9. The strike has put at least one million children out of school countrywide.

The teachers say they will resume work and continue talks on the outstanding issues only if the government pays salaries for the period they have been on strike, but the government has refused.

Burma: Nine face execution

Burmese authorities have sentenced nine workers to death on charges of high treason stemming from their contacts with the United Nations' International Labour Organization.

One defendant received the death sentence for possession of an ILO report on forced labor in Burma and the business card of an ILO official serving in the country. At the same time the government is prosecuting workers for these contacts, it is officially pledging to work with the ILO to stamp out forced labor.

Colombian death squad kills peasant leader

BY PETER MOORE

Six Colombian organizations have denounced the "vile murder" of peasant leader Angel Maria Rodriguez, 58, in the municipality of Villahermosa Tolima. Rodriguez was the founder of the Small and Middle-sized Farmers of North Tolima (ASOPEMA).

Paramilitaries entered the town at 7:30 a.m. March 3, pounding on doors and insulting people at the health centre. They asked for Rodriguez, grabbed him and carried him 500 metres away where they killed him.

In a statement, the organizations blamed the Colombian government for this and other murders in Villahermosa for not heeding its call to end the threat of the paramilitary groups in the North Tolima area. They demanded that the government listen to their call for safe communities and the security of its citizens in Villahermosa.

New attack hits Colombian union SINALTRAINAL

On March 2, four heavily armed men entered SINALTRAINAL union headquarters in Barranquilla, turning over everything in their path, asking insistently for "the DVD," and stealing approximately 4 million pesos and the security camera VHS tape.

The attack came the day after the union filed a collective bargaining petition with Panamco Colombia/Coca Cola FEMSA in the capital city, Bogota.

Australian unionists ban government work

In response to plans by the New South Wales government to sell its print and mail service division (cmSolutions) and its consumables and specialty products division (Q Stores), workers at cmSolutions decided to immediately ban print and mail services including publication of the NSW *Government Gazette* and delivery of lottery tickets and police mail.

Workers said they would also stop processing paperwork needed to invoice customers, and end deliveries to government offices.

The two operations are units within the NSW Department of Commerce. Staff say the sale would result in lay-offs and increase costs, as well as undermining public services.